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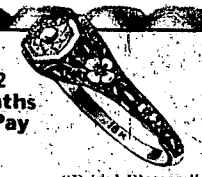

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DT12-Dazzling cluster of 7 perfectly matched genuine blue white diamonds; hand pierced 18K Solid White Gold lady's mounting. Looks like $750 solitaire. $3.96 a mo.

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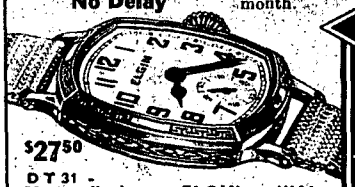

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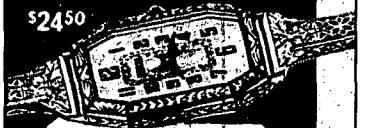

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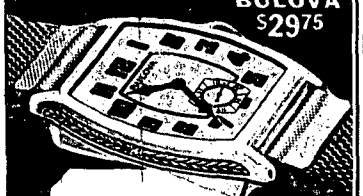

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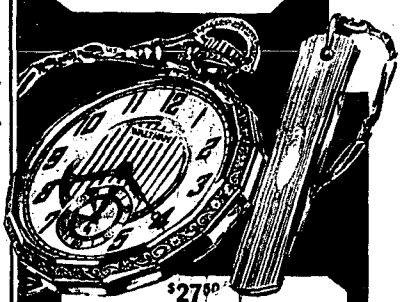

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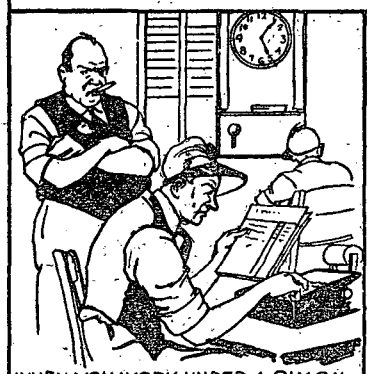

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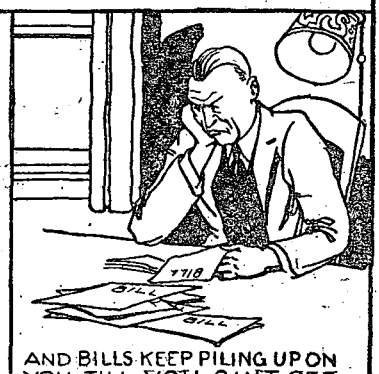

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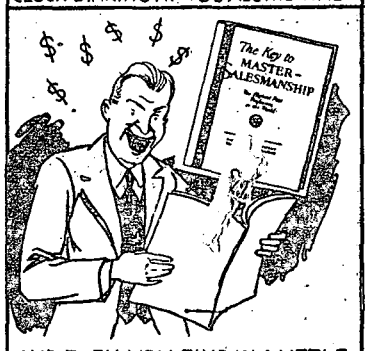

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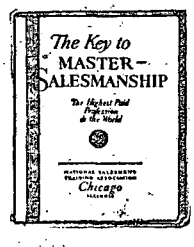

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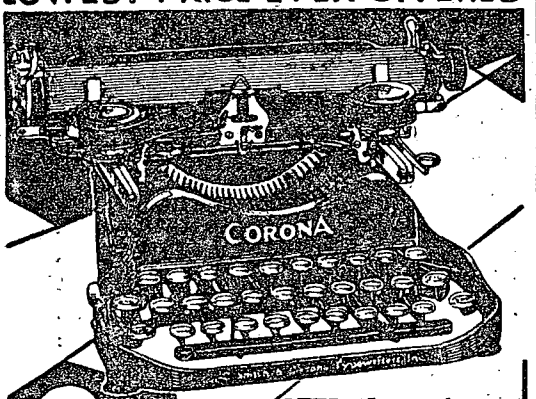

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"LOOK.... he's imitating a pianist!"

.....someone shouted Then a queer thing happened

JACK had strummed some "Blues" for us on his uke and Nan had just finished her screamingly funny burlesque on the "Kinkajou." We were all set for dancing when—the radio refused to work!

No amount of jiggling brought it to life, either. In spite of our best efforts, all we could get from that confounded radio was such desolate howls that the girls begged us to leave the poor old thing alone.

Someone made a half-hearted suggestion of bridge. But Tom had a better plan. Pulling Joe to his feet—good old "sit-in-the-corner" Joe, whom everyone liked to pick on—he cried in a loud voice:

"Just a minute, folks! The party is saved! Joe, here, has kindly offered to enliven the proceedings with a piano solo . . ."

Loud cheering drowned out the rest. This promised to be good—for, as we all knew, Joe couldn't play a note. Naturally we expected him to clown . . .

Just as he sat down at the piano, Tom called out:

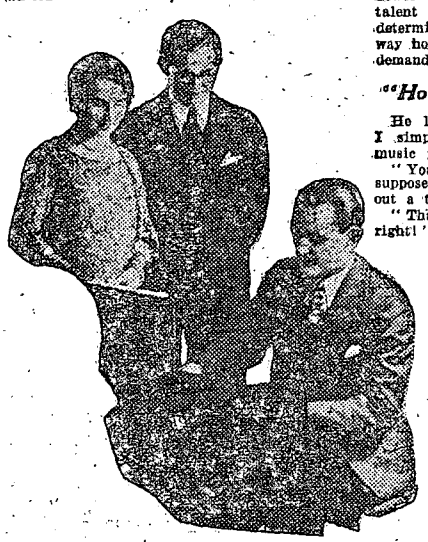
"Play 'The Varsity Drag'—that's a hot dance number!"

I couldn't help smiling at the thought of Joe—who had always taken a back seat at our parties—playing "hot" music. Excited whispers came from all parts of the room. "Wonder what he's going to do!"—"He doesn't know one note from another!" Suddenly someone shouted:

"Get this! Look—he's imitating a pianist!"

A Queer Thing Happens

Raising his hand melodramatically, Joe waited a moment to command silence.



Then, without any more preliminaries, and to the complete amazement of us all, he struck the first bars of—"The Varsity Drag!"

And how! With all the verve and expression of a professional! No wonder Tom's eyes almost popped out of his head! This wasn't the clowning he had expected Joe to do!

Unable to resist the tantalizing music, couple after couple glided around the floor. When Joe stopped playing, the applause could have been heard around the block—only to be instantly followed by requests for more numbers.

All evening they kept Joe busy at the piano—playing jazz, popular songs, sentimental ballads, even classical stuff—everything the crowd asked for, and they asked for plenty!

How that lad could play! I was dumbfounded. Why, it was incredible! Joe had always seemed to be a "born wallflower"—he had never displayed any talent for entertaining—yet now . . . I determined to solve the puzzle. On the way home that night I drew Joe aside and demanded:

"How on earth did you do it?"

He laughed. "Why, it was very easy! I simply took that home-study course in music your cousin told us about . . ."

"You don't mean that course that was supposed to show you how to play without a teacher, do you?" I interrupted.

"That's it! Say, it's a great course, all right!" he enthused. "There wasn't any expensive private teacher to pay—and since the lessons came by mail, I didn't have to set aside valuable hours for study. In fact, I practiced only in my spare time, a few minutes a day. And the course is thorough! Why, almost before I knew it, I was playing simple pieces by note, and . . ."

"I guess you don't have to tell me how thorough it is," I broke in. "Your performance tonight was a knockout! And you used to say you had no 'talent'!"

"I haven't," he insisted. "Anybody can learn to play the U. S. School of Music way!"

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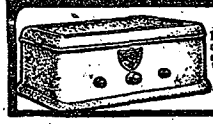

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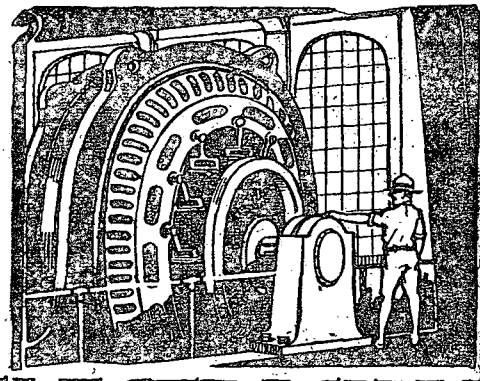

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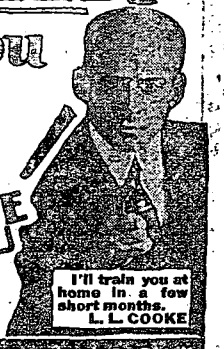

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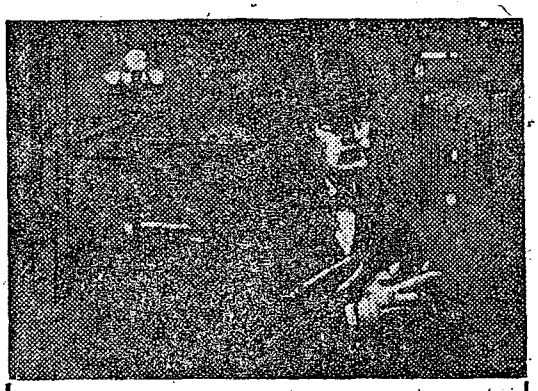

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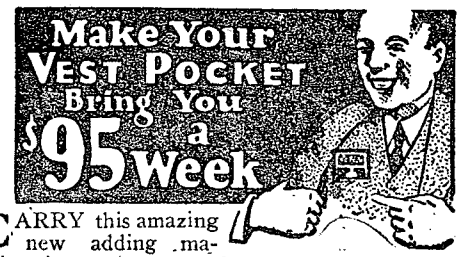

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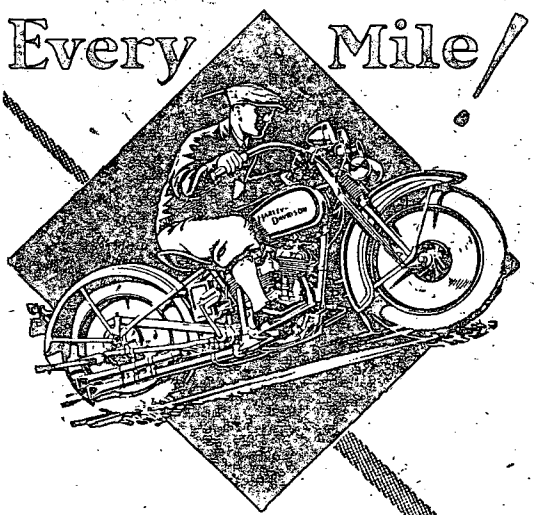

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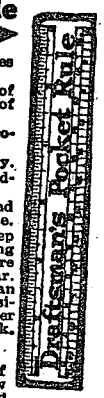

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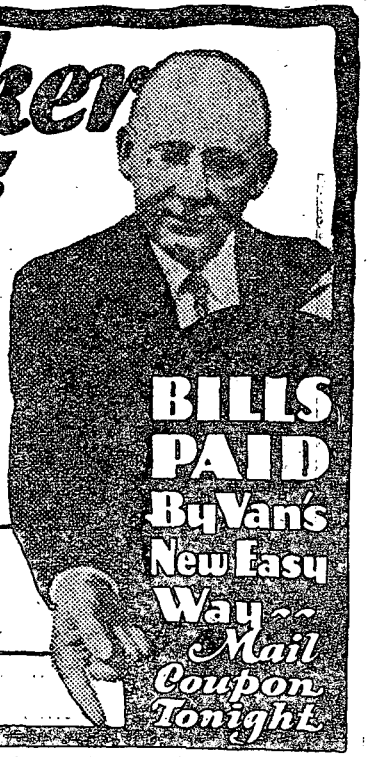

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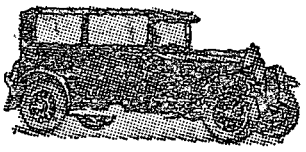

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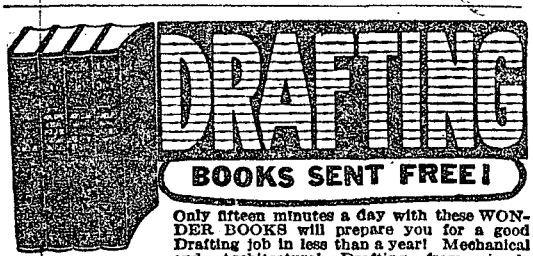

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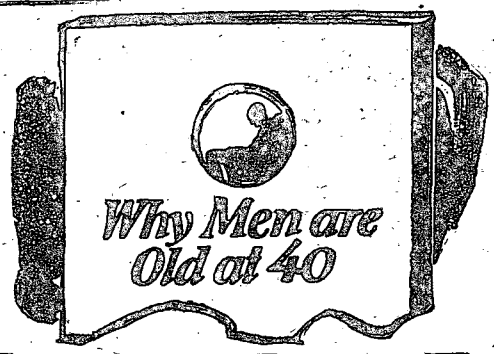

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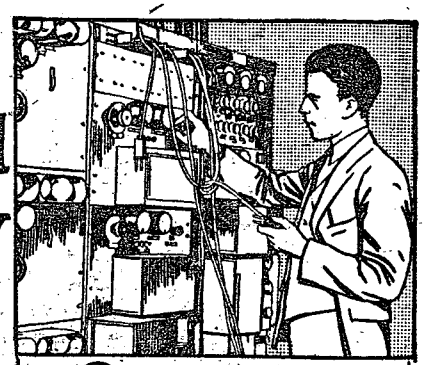

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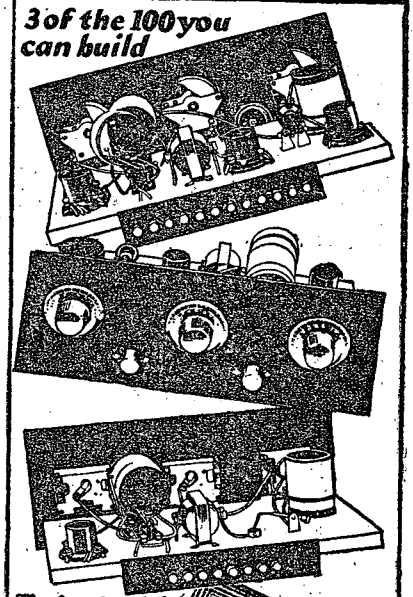

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Stormy Dorn

By Cherry Wilson

Author of "Wildcatted," etc.

CHAPTER I.

HORSE-STRUCK.

ON through Montana's wild sage wastes swept the fast freight, tossing high over its shoulder its black plume of smoke, arrogantly whistling for the right of way, sending trespassing range stock scurrying back into the sage. On, at full speed, shrieking, swinging, swaying, toward that lonely spot where wagon road and railroad crossed.

In their special car, just ahead of the caboose, four blooded race horses lurched against their padded stalls, rebelling at this outrageous treatment in every quivering, high-strung nerve, with the peer of the four—the glorious blood-red bay in the largest stall—taking care not to trample the little figure huddled in the straw at his feet. An appealing little gamin, this, who pressed his hands tightly to his stomach to ease hunger's pangs; and, in watching the red racer with worshiping eyes, forgot for one disastrous instant to maintain the anxious vigil he had kept so long that he might burrow more deeply into the straw at the first sign of approaching trainmen.

As tragedy bore down upon that stall, the freight, whistling for the crossing, tooted an extra shrill warning at the rig about to pass on the wagon road—a buckboard drawn by a team of flighty duns, and driven by a native Montanan. A leathery old-timer, the driver, as typical of his kind as though he had been cast in bronze and made the model. A man who had seen the buffalo go and

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the steel laid down, and counted it loss instead of gain. A man who was "queer," folks said, "dying at the top," because he had pledged himself to the preservation of the one breath of the Old West that he loved best—the wild horses on Bright Angel Range.

Now, as train and buckboard were brought together at the crossroads, by some strange chance—no, by divine decree, since Chance is but another name for God—old Trinidad Dorn pulled up his team to let the freight pass. But, as though with the malicious design of scaring his horses, it slowed, with a harsh grind of brakes and rasping jolts, directly across the road. And the old man, forced to throw all his weight upon the reins, cast hostile glances at the train, even as he chided the frantic duns:

"Shame on you, boys—scairt by a train!" There was affection even in the way he scolded them. "Can't say as I blame you, though! Of all the screechy —— Git down! You can't climb over the pesky thing! The nerve of it, stoppin' here, miles from a—— What the Sam Hill!"

In his indignation at what was taking place before his eyes, old Trinidad slacked his grip on the reins, and the horses shied into the roadside ditch, all but upsetting the rig. For, in the open door of the car directly in front of him, a burly, blue-jumpered form appeared, dragging a squirming, scratching, little figure, who fought back at every step, shrilling protests, until the man swung him off his feet, and threw him bodily from the train.

By the time Trinidad got the buckboard righted and the team in hand, the train was moving on, and he was dumfounded to see the youngster running after the car, clawing to get back in. But, with a well-placed kick, the brakeman sent him spinning again. Swiftly, the little tartar picked himself up and with a determination that made Trinidad gasp raced after the car in another desperate attempt to get aboard. He caught hold of the floor and was swinging there, when the man brutally planted a boot on the clutching fingers, and the boy dropped with a cry of pain.

But, stooping like lightning, he snatched up a rock and slammed it at the brakeman, then let fly a veritable hail of rocks as the freight gained momentum. Nor did he cease until the caboose was out of range. Then, gazing after the train, the lad suddenly collapsed on the track, his face buried in his grimy hands, his frail body racked with sobs.

As quickly as his stiff joints would permit, Trinidad got out of the rig and went to the boy. He knelt beside him, appalled to feel, as he put an arm around him, how terribly thin he was beneath the rags.

"Son, what's wrong?" he cried, moved strongly.

The boy of the train looked up at the man of the range. The boy was an indescribably sad little fellow of about fourteen. His tear-streaked face was pinched and drawn, and startlingly white for all its grime. Whiter still for the disheveled black hair that framed it, and for the big, black eyes that dwarfed it. Eyes full of nameless grief, and dauntless spirit.

Curiously drawn to him, old Trinidad begged again: "What's wrong, son?"

Painfully the boy sobbed: "He—found—me—with Red Streak!"

Trinidad's white brows knit. Red Streak? A queer name, but—— "A pard, huh?" he asked.

The brimming eyes flashed scorn—and pity, too, for the questioner. "Gee, you are green! Red Streak's a horse! Colonel Seiver's race horse. The fastest horse in all the world, I guess. The colonel's takin' his string to Spokane for the races, an' I stowed away with Red Streak. Come all the way from Saint Louis! We was due in Spokane

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to-morrow, an' now I—now he—— Aw, gee!" And he gazed with wild longing at the freight, flashing like a meteor through the sage.

Understandingly, the man muttered, "Hoss-struck!" gently adding, as he saw the boy's resentment: "It's no disgrace. In fact, I'm said to be in a bad way myself with the same disease."

Then, with a glance at the restless team, "Waal, son, what you aim to do now?"

"Hop the next freight for Spokane," said the boy, as a matter of course.

But trains did not stop here, Trinidad pointed out. This stop had been entirely in his honor. There were no regular stops this side of Rawhide—ten miles on; and none back before Medicine Springs—twenty odd miles—and nothing but a water tank. Flaring up, as he thought of the plight the boy would have been in, had he not chanced along, "I'd sure admire to take that brakie apart," he declared. "Puttin' a kid off here—miles from nowhere!"

That stung the boy's pride. "Aw, who's a kid?" he fiercely demanded. "I can look out for myself, I guess. I'll count ties to Rawhide, if I got to!"

Gritty little shaver, admired Trinidad! Didn't pity himself, and wouldn't let any one else do so! Right stuff in him, too—loved horses enough to follow one half across a continent—game enough to walk ten miles through this heat to be with it, though right now he was so wobbly weak——

"Say," an awful suspicion struck Trinidad, "when did you last connect with a meal, son?"

Red burned through the boy's grime. "Nosey, ain't you?" The high voice shook. "Well, if it's anything to you, I had a hot dog in Saint Louis the night we left."

Recalling with horror that Saint Louis was over a thousand miles away—three days, by freight, or more—the old man pressed:

"An' nothing since?"

"Sure," with brave defiance. "Oats. Plenty of 'em!"

Instantly, Trinidad was on his feet, pulling the starving lad along. "Git in this rig, pronto!" he ordered him. "You're goin'——"

"I'm goin' to Spokane!" shrilled the boy hysterically, almost in terror, jerking free. "Red Streak runs there, an' I——"

"You ain't goin' nowhere but out to the Flyin' Star, till you git a square meal under your belt! You won't fetch up with a house this side of Rawhide, an' in your shape you'd die on the way. Oats! Good gosh! Climb in!"

But the boy's heart and soul were strained on the last feather of smoke from the train that was bearing Red Streak away from him. And his lips trembled. "Aw, what a break!" he muttered.

"About the break," said Trinidad—surely inspired—"it don't strike me so bad, for a hombre what thinks as much of horses as you do, to git plunked off right in hoss country. Where we use 'em as the Lord intended 'em to be. Where they grow wild."

Suddenly it was as if another boy stood there—an eager boy with shining eyes.

"Wild ones!" he pleaded, his breath coming hard and fast. "Honest? You ain't kiddin' me?"

"If you think I'm kiddin'," drawled Trinidad, mighty proud of himself, "you just ought to hear my brother Deem take on about 'em! Accordin' to him, we're plumb overrun with 'em—they're a pest."

"A pest—horses!"

"Not to me, son. That's Deem's idee! But it's one subject on which me an' him never can agree." And Trinidad cried, his own eyes glowing, his own breath quickening, "See them hills?" transferring the reins to point over the sage plains; beyond the crim-

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son streaks of the broken buttes, to the mountains lifting blue as blue. "They live there—the wild ones—in Bright Angel Hills. Not as many as Deem says, mebbe—but there's sure a heap of 'em!"

And the boy breathed, his rapt eyes on the mountains: "Don't they belong to any one?"

"To God, I reckon," reverently quavered Trinidad Dorn.

"Could I——" Oh, wish too great for utterance! "If I caught one, would it be—mine?"

"I'd see it was!"

The boy put his hand in Trinidad's. "I'll go," he said softly, his thin face lit with a wondrous light. "I'll catch me one—then I'll ride him to Spokane to find Red Streak!"

On that understanding he got into the buckboard beside his new-found friend, and was bumped over the crossing, and whisked briskly through the rolling sage sea toward the Flying Star Ranch.

"Where's your folks, son?" the old man quizzed with friendly interest, as they whirled along.

A shrug was his only answer.

He suggested helpfully: "Dead, mebbe?"

The boy shrugged again. And the man wondered if love for the race horse had made him run away from home. He said, a bit reproachfully: "You must 'a' had a home."

"Sure," the lad owned readily. "The Peter Grimm Home in Chester—a orphan's home. I growed up in it. But they farmed me out to a truckster last fall. He said I could take care of his horses, but he put me to diggin' potatoes. Worked me like a dog, an' beat the tar out of me. Say," he warned, with wisdom cruelly earned, "if you got anything like that up your sleeve——"

"Keep your seat," advised the old Montanan placidly. "I ain't a truckster. If the Flyin' Star as much as sprouted a spud, I'd leave!"

Then he inquired, not so placidly, "Beat you, did he?"

The boy nodded. And, in a burst of rare confidence, went on: "Ever see a harness mark?"

"Plenty of 'em. Every hoss that wears one long enough——"

"I mean—on a man!" And the boy pulled down his ragged shirt, exhibiting, with a certain pride, terrible scars on his back and shoulders that made Trinidad's blood run cold. "He give me them with a harness. Walloped the daylights out of me. I couldn't crawl for a week. Then I run away. A man give me a ride to Saint Louis in his truck—he was takin' Red Streak in for Colonel Seivers. I—I made my own way ever since."

He lapsed into silence. And the old man, shocked by his story, by what he read between the lines—frightful things the red scars told him, the starved form, and the tears which the lad was even now trying to brush away unseen—was hard put to it to hide his pity this time.

"Waal," he allowed, giving the reins a flip, "that's tough sleddin'."

"Oh, not so bad," came the prompt assurance. "There's lots of ways a man can make a livin'. I run chores for the stable hands, an' they let me sleep with Red Streak, an' exercise him. He—he liked me to be with him——" His voice broke then.

"Not to change the subject," said Trinidad, going right about it, "what's your name, son?"

Lifelessly the boy said: "'Stormy.'"

"Uh-huh," mused the old fellow, with a slow grin. "I ain't had the honor of your acquaintance long, but I can see how that might fit. Waal, Stormy, I'm Trinidad Dorn, an' I don't know when I've been so proud to meet any one."

Stormy looked at the brown hand

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held out to him, then, earnestly, into the face above it, as if in fear of mockery. But seeing that only simple truth was reflected there, he shook hands gravely.

"Trini——" His tongue tripped, and he laughed boyishly. "Gee, that's a heck of a name!"

"If it's too much for you," suggested its owner queerly, "suppose you split it, an' call me 'Dad.'" And his lonely bachelor heart flooded with strange warmth at the boy's quick nod.

To keep him from grieving over Red Streak, old Trinidad gossiped pleasantly as they drove along of the fun Stormy would have at the Flying Star, and of the folks he'd meet there. Especially of Kerry—Deem's daughter—who was about his same age and disposition—"willful as Rainbow River, an' as full of life an' sparkle." And of Deem——

But strangely, thinking of Deem, a sudden, sharp misgiving seized Trinidad, and he looked down at the boy, to find him fast asleep.

"Plumb tuckered," he muttered, misty-eyed. "Waal, sleep tight, you poor little maverick. Ol' Trin will take care of you."

To keep him from falling out as the buckboard bumped over the ruts, he put an arm about him, and held him close. So they drove on—Stormy trustfully relaxed against Trinidad, and Trinidad's troubled old eyes fixed on the blue hills west, where the "wild boys" lived. One subject on which he and Deem could not agree!

But he thanked God that he was blessed with enough of this world's goods to hold those hills a sanctuary to the animals he loved, to save them from the wholesale slaughter advocated by his practical neighbors and his ambitious brother. And he prayed for strength to hold out against neighbor, against brother, against the stinging barbs of ridicule, the pressure brought to bear in every conceivable guise by the almighty dollar!

Nor did he dream that he held God's answer! He did not dream that this little outcast, who was in Bright Angel Range against his will—literally kicked into it, and with only the wild wish to go—this frail lad, whose heart throbbed with the same fanatical love of horses, whose courage no odds daunted, was the one person in all the world, perhaps, who would carry out his life's purpose, who would fight with him against the world for an ideal, and fight on alone when he was gone.

Ah, even more tightly would Trinidad Dorn have held Stormy had he but known!

CHAPTER II.

SULTAN.

DRIVING through lilac dusk within the boundaries of the Flying Star, Trinidad wondered nervously what Deem would say about his bringing Stormy home. But what could he say? There wasn't anything else to do. If Deem had come upon him stranded that a way—so, in his guileless heart, thought Trinidad—he would have been the first to pick him up.

Nevertheless, his misgiving grew to dread as they rattled over the plank bridge spanning Rainbow River—lashed white in its swift fall from Bright Angel Heights and always with a rainbow on it when the sun shone on the spray—coming, almost at once, in view of the great, log ranch house—pleasant with verandas, cool and dim behind the honeysuckle vines, beautifully situated in the red willows at the river's bend. And Trinidad hoped that he could get Stormy, who still slept soundly, cleaned up a lot before Deem saw him.

But this hope crumbled as they wheeled up the drive, and a man stepped out of the big red barn and came toward them, a man startlingly like

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Trinidad, and startlingly unlike. Much younger, stronger, in vigorous middle age, but cast in the same mold. Though not cast in bronze—nothing so warm! Nothing but cold, unfeeling stone could have composed Deem Dorn.

"Back, huh?" was his surly greeting. "I've been lookin'——" He stopped, astonished, as he saw the boy.

"Where'd you pick that up?" he demanded coldly.

Fondly, Trinidad looked down at the waif, who had flinched awake at the hard contempt in that voice, then back at his brother.

"It's Stormy, Deem." His tone placated, even pleaded. "He got put off the train just as I come to the crossin', an' hadn't any place to go. So I brung him home."

But Deem Dorn had been quick to mark the fondness in his brother's look, the protective way his arm was thrown about the little vagabond, who faced him with brave defiance, even now allied with Trinidad against him. As it was now, so it would be to the tragic end! And Deem Dorn might almost have known it, so very vindictive his tone.

"Ain't you mighty promiscuous about what you bring home?" he asked.

"You seem to forget, Deem," said old Trin steadily, "that it's my home as much as yours."

Which was one thing his mercenary brother never forgot! Deem never ceased to begrudge Trinidad his half interest in the Flying Star. But it was the first time Trin had ever reminded him of it, and Deem saw the handwriting on the wall!

For he, too, had a life's purpose! That the Flying Star should go intact to his only child, Kerry, whom he idolized. It was certain to, if his brother's share went to his natural heirs. But now he had taken a fancy to this tramp! And when Trinidad's stubborn heart was set on a thing, as it was on making a "horse heaven" out of Bright Angel Range——

"'Bronc' Craig's here," harshly he broke in on his own harsh thoughts. "He's come to break that saddle stock. Now, Trin, let's kill two birds with one stone, an' let Bronc——"

"Not so fast, Trin!" The speaker deliberately thrust his boot through the wheel as his brother was about to drive on, his mild face set like flint. "See if you can't be sensible for once! Bronc wants to rid the hills of them wild mustangs."

"The buzzard!" cried the old man, in a sublimated fury that filled the listening boy with awe and fierce sympathy. "Wants to rid the hills of my mustangs, does he?"

"Yes," Deem declared coldly. "So does every one—but you! Trin, you've got to heed the majority!"

The old man's anger passed, leaving his brown face white. Wearily he brushed a shaking hand across his eyes.

"Deem," he begged, his voice, too, shaking, "let's not scrap over that ag'in! Can't you let me alone? You know how I stand."

"Like a mule—that's how you stand!" Angrily, Deem bent over the wheel. "You won't give an inch. You forget we're partners."

"Not on that!" There was a note of triumph in Trin's voice that made Deem writhe, that made Stormy applaud, though he had not the first idea of what it was all about: "You tell 'em, Dad!"

Contemptuously ignoring that, Deem stormed: "We're partners on the Flyin' Star, an' your crazy whim is losin' me money every year. If you'd let Bronc——"

"If I had my way," the old man shrilled, "I wouldn't let that hombre on the ranch! I give in to you about hirin' him—about everything that don't concern them mustangs. But when it comes to slaughterin' horses to line my

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pockets—— Them wild boys is mine! They stay! An' that's my last word, Deem."

"But not mine!"

No, not Deem's. Death and madness lay in his last word

He said now—a threat he so terribly made good: "I'll stand so much, Trin, and no more. I'll jump over the traces if you drive me too far! You're touched when it comes to horses. I've stood a lot of crazy things from you, like——" His cold, light-blue eyes fell on the ragged lad militantly ranged at his brother's side—"like you foistin' this brat on me!"

For, even then, Deem's hatred for Stormy was savage and full-fanged!

But what mattered Deem Dorn? What was one foe among so many friends? And every one else was kind. Trinidad lived in the bunk house with his men, leaving his married brother in sole possession of the old Dorn home. So it was to the bunk house that Stormy was taken—and straight to the hearts of the Flying Star crew. His story touched and won the men. In any case, they would have been won to him, for they looked upon him as belonging, somehow, to Trin Dorn. And like all men who serve two masters, they loved the one—Trinidad—and hated, Deem, the other. "Trin's boy" could call on them for anything—even to the last drop of their loyal hearts' blood.

They could not rest unless he was nibbling some "snack," as though fearing that, with several square meals under his belt, he was yet in danger of starvation. They could not do enough for him, and they did everything with surprising tact, making it seem that he, by accepting, was favoring them. This was evidenced in the scene that took place the next daybreak by Stormy's bunk.

Barely were the boy's eyes open, when "Cherokee," the grizzled old foreman of the Flying Star, sidled up, with a sheepish grin on his face and, in his hands, a little pair of real leather chaps.

"Which ain't much," he apologized—though he had stayed up half the night cutting them down to Stormy's size—"but I'd be right proud, kid, if you could wear 'em."

And while the delighted boy was sliding into them, the youngest waddy came across with a blue flannel shirt that had "shrunk in the wash, first time out," and he'd "sure admire" to see somebody get back his money's worth.

Before ever the shirt was tucked inside the chaps, the Beau Brummel of the outfit was knotting his spare bandanna about Stormy's throat, explaining that red did not become his type of manly beauty. Which was a barefaced lie, and the waddy knew it!

By this time the hard-boiled wrangler had dug a pair of little hand-made boots out of his trunk, which—"Believe it, or not," he bragged, "I could git into oncet! They say if you keep a thing for seven years, you'll find a use for it. But I sure got stuck with them boots. If you kin wear 'em, kid, you'll ease my pack." And they weren't a bad fit.

Trinidad, witnessing this with a lump in his throat, suddenly thought of the present he had brought for Kerry's birthday next week. And, since there was time to get another gift, he crowned the really attractive outfit, and the boy's frantic joy, with a brand-new, black sombrero. This the grinning roustabout insisted on adorning with the snakeskin band from his own Stetson.

And there Stormy was, a regular little puncher, of whom any man in Montana might have been mighty proud. And it was hard to tell which was happiest—he, or the rest of them. But they were happy longest. For his big, black eyes, resting on each rough, beaming face, suddenly overflowed.

"But I won't be stayin'!" he cried,

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as though these things were bonds to hold him.

"That's all right," said Trinidad. "Gosh knows you're welcome to 'em."

"You know," confided the boy tearfully, "I've got to find Red Streak."

Sure! They all savvied that. But not a man of them could bear to think of his drifting on—bucking the world again. Least of all old Trinidad.

"But how can we keep him?" he asked Cherokee, wanting to do it with an intensity he could not comprehend. "I can't force him to stay—when he trusted me to come. How can we make him forget Red Streak? I heard him cryin' in the night. An' first thing this mornin', he asked how far it was to Spokane!"

Thoughtfully, Cherokee rubbed his chin. "Keep him busy," was his sage dictum. "Don't give him time to grieve. It ought to be plumb easy—with Bronc Craig here. Excitement beats ropes, to hold a kid. An' things is sure to be excitin' where Bronc is."

Now, after dinner, hurrying to join Stormy at the breaking pen, things sure did look exciting to Trinidad, with horses jamming the stout log inclosure, and dust soaring up in clouds from under their flying hoofs, as they fought back from the riders cutting out those to be broken first.

Bossing the procedure was a hawk-eyed, hawk-nosed individual—Bronc Craig. Yesterday Trinidad had thought his employment a disgrace to the ranch. But now he was reconciled to Bronc's being there, if only his activities served to divert the boy.

And seeing him among the watchers, Trinidad had hopes of that. For Stormy was hanging breathlessly over the fence, gazing spellbound at the horses—more horses than he had ever seen, and all of them looking wild to him, though Cherokee had said they weren't real wild ones.

"Dad," he cried, as Trinidad settled on the rail beside him, the proudest man alive, "see that horse—that big black?" pointing out a beautiful, four-legged fiend of purest ebony. "They can't get within a mile of him. Cherokee says he's an outlaw! Gee, you ought to see him fight!"

"That's Sultan," said Dad soberly. "He's an outlaw, all right. We got him from a trader last fall, which accounts for that."

Eagerly, Stormy swung about. "Why does that account for it?"

"Because outlaws ain't born but made, son. An' we don't make 'em at the Flyin' Star. It took a lot of mean treatment to make Sultan what he is, to set him agin' all men. He thinks they're all his enemies—so, natcherally, he fights 'em. The hombre what spoiled that hoss sure ought to be——"

"Killed dead!" Stormy's black eyes flashed.

"Waal, nearly," Trinidad unsmilingly allowed. "Son, every man on the ranch—me included—has tried to tame that hoss. Now, Bronc's goin' to have a chance at him. He'll break him, too. He don't care how—heart, body, an' spirit, like as not. He don't give a hoot about the inside of a hoss!"

Stormy looked at Bronc Craig as though he wore horns, then at the fighting horse, even now being winnowed from the rest. And, visioning that high spirit broken, he begged: "Don't let him, Dad!"

But sadly the old man said: "It'll be best for Sultan in the long run, son. He's too valuable to be let alone. An' a outlaw's life ain't a easy one."

Silently they watched the fiery outlaw. Bronc, with some quick help from the Flying Star men, had cut him from the swarming band. Sultan's blood was up, and he seemed to know that the fight was between himself and this one man. Warily he retreated, as Bronc advanced with ready rope. The reata shot out. Sultan, lunging from it,

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crashed into the fence. But the noose fell true about his neck, and Bronc, bracing himself, gave a sudden heave that jerked the outlaw end for end. Up again, Sultan fought the rope like a mad thing, throwing himself this way and that, his small ears flat, his eyes ablaze with savage hate, his fury expressed in frightful, throttled bawls of rage.

Then, as if to tantalize his victim, Bronc threw several inches of slack along the rope. The outlaw, feeling the strangling pressure ease, spun to the fence, saw freedom beyond, and, gathering himself, made a desperate jump—only to be jerked back, and thrown with smashing force to the hard-packed earth. In a twinkling he struggled to his feet, shook himself in his insane fury, and, without the slightest warning, plunged with murderous eyes and gaping jaws straight for his tormentor.

The relish in Bronc's hawkish eyes, as he side-stepped the charge, sickened Trinidad. And he turned from the scene, his frown erased by a smile, to see his niece, Kerry Dorn, running up to the fence, a pretty little girl in a blue gingham dress. Her face was sweet and sensitive, and her soft, brown hair was forever blowing in her eyes—eyes of a rare blue, like prairie violets.

She stopped now, to push her hair out of her eyes, and look up at that tense row of backs. Her Uncle Trin started toward her, intending to introduce her to Stormy, and break the ice between them. Then, seeing Deem near, he refrained, fearing Deem would not like it. But to his delight Kerry did not stand on ceremony.

Chancing to catch Stormy's eye, she smiled up at him in her spontaneous, friendly way, an overture to which the boy responded shyly. Then, since girls did not interest him much and horses did a lot, he immediately turned back to the grim battle inside the fence; while Kerry climbed the corral a little beyond, and utterly indifferent to the danger of her position perched like a bluebird on the topmost rail.

Breathlessly, all watched the conflict in there. Bronc Craig, acutely conscious of his audience, extended himself. By a neat trick—one of many he had on tap—he flipped a half-hitch about Sultan's flailing forefeet as he reared, jerking him violently to his knees. Up in an instant, the infuriated beast plunged for the man who played cat and mouse with him. And Bronc—whose skill none could deny, though they might despise his tactics—turned the rush to his own advantage by again flipping a snaky coil along the rope, snaring the near front foot, and throwing the lariat over Sultan's back. Then, with a sudden jerk, as the horse again reared, Bronc sent him crashing back to earth.

But, by some miscalculation, Sultan's thrashing weight snapped the rope from Bronc's grasp. And, before the fact was fully realized, the outlaw was on his feet, had whirled, and in a wild effort to escape plunged straight for that panel of fence where Kerry sat paralyzed with fright, beyond the help of father, of uncle, of any Flying Star man! Beyond all help, it seemed to them! For there was no time to run to her—no time for anything!

With throbbing hearts they saw the crazed brute launch himself into the air in his mad attempt to leap the barrier, launch himself straight for the little girl in blue.

They saw—or some did—in action quick as chain lightning, a boy spring up behind her, yanking her down, just as the outlaw crashed on the very log where she had been; a boy who fell with her from the top of the eight-foot fence, and lay over her, stunned, while over them the great body of the outlaw balanced.

For Sultan, falling short in his jump

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by the barest margin, had landed on the top rail and teetered there, for endless, age-long seconds, now toppling toward the helpless youngsters as the shouts of horror goaded him to wilder struggles, now drawn back by his own weight. But, at dreadful length, Sultan fell again inside the fence, where, dripping red from the deep shoulder wound inflicted by a sharp splinter left from a limb that had been chopped off, he gamely blasted a challenge, and rolled red eyes about for an antagonist.

But the men had rushed to Stormy and Kerry.

"Great work, son!" Tears of relief rolled down Trinidad's seamed cheeks, as he hugged the pair to him. "The fastest thinkin' I ever seen!"

"Or me!" praised Cherokee, affected the same way. "Trin, it was sure a lucky day for Kerry when you brought Stormy home!"

Deem Dorn brushed the speaker aside. His face, chalky from fright, was darkening fast. For he saw the boy, who to him was an interloper, a menace to his ambitious plans for his daughter, making himself solid with Trinidad, putting him, Deem, under eternal obligation—an obligation he repudiated now, as selfish greed hypnotized him into the belief that there had been no real danger. And, goaded by sight of Stormy's hand in Kerry's—for, still shaken, the girl clung to him—"You hobo!" he blazed, with flaying contempt. "Take your paws off her!"

The boy whitened, as though the words were blows upon his face. The men cried out for shame. And Trinidad got up, looking hard at Deem, seeing him as he never had before—no longer with the love-fogged eyes of a brother, but as these men saw him.

"Deem," he said strangely, "he saved her life!"

"Bah!" Deem sneered. "He saw his chance to make a grand-stand play, an'——"

"Please, daddy!" Even Kerry's cheeks were red with shame for him. "If Stormy hadn't——"

"Get up to the house where you belong!" her father commanded, in a tone he had never taken to her before. And, curtly ordering the men to work, he turned back to his brother, saying:

"Trin, I want a word with you."

CHAPTER III.

RED STREAK.

BUT Trinidad paused to pat Stormy comfortingly, and leave orders that Sultan be put in the south pasture until his wound was healed.

"He'll have a week of peace, anyway," he said grimly, "before that bronc-fighter gits another whirl at him!"

Then he went to his brother, pacing in the shade of the cook shack.

"What I want to know," Deem broke out on him, "is that guttersnipe here to stay?"

"If he'll stay," said Trin, with a decision new to him.

"If!" Deem jeered. "As if you had any doubt of it! That kid knows when he's landed soft! Waal, I've got something to say about it! I don't aim to have him around Kerry."

"He won't hurt Kerry," said the old man, with maddening placidity. "Be good for her—havin' some one her own age around. Most like havin' a brother. It ain't right to raise one alone."

Deem's face was black. Like many people obsessed by jealousy, he voiced it. "I s'pose, next thing," he sneered, "you'll be adoptin' him?"

He craved denial. But, to his dismay, his brother said thoughtfully: "That ain't a bad idee."

"Don't do it, Trin!" Deem was terrified by the seed he had sown. "Take my advice, an' send him packin'. A stray like that is bad medicine. He's

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bound to come to some bad end. He'll shame you—steal us blind! He'll bite the hand that feeds him. What do you know about him?"

"I know," said the old man slowly, "that a kid who likes hosses as much as he does, can't be bad. I know I like him. I want to keep him, if I can. I'm gittin' old, an' I ain't got chick or child——"

"You've got Kerry," Deem reminded him.

Trinidad's face softened. "God bless her, yes! But she's yours, Deem. I want some one to call my own."

With the unbridled passion that was to bring black ruin to them all, Deem Dorn foamed. "There's no fool like an old one—you need a guardian!"

Sick at heart, never able to feel the same toward Deem again, Trinidad turned from his insults. He turned, strangely enough, to Stormy. But the boy was not at the corral.

"Better hunt him up," suggested Cherokee. "Deem was pretty rough on him."

Trinidad ransacked the buildings, sure that Stormy was gone. But, broadening his search, he found him lying in the waving grass beside Rainbow River, his wistful eyes turned west, whither Spokane was and Red Streak!

"Dad," Stormy pleaded, lifting a hot face at the old man's step, "could we go catch a wild horse now?"

Wanted to leave already! Well, Dad did not blame him. But the smile he forced was wintry.

"Now? That's a big order, son."

"You said there was plenty! You said I could have one!"

"An' so you can. But catchin' one takes time—days, son, not just the tag end of one. But I'll tell you what we'll do——" For Dad Dorn wanted to leave, too; for him—as well as for the mustangs—Bright Angel Hills were a refuge! "I'll have the cook put us up a snack, an' we'll ride up there. If we're lucky, we'll mebbe have a look at one."

Gently a voice struck in: "You can ride my horse, Stormy."

Kerry was with them—standing in the deep, lush grass, in the bright sun, against the rainbow that hung over the river. And always, thereafter, Stormy associated the rainbow with her. Lowering and black though clouds fell, there was always a rainbow if Kerry was there!

"That's what I'd 'a' gambled you'd do, Kerry," he uncle thanked her, when Stormy was too shy to. "But I reckon he'd better not use your horse." For, while Trinidad had no pride for himself, he was fiercely proud for Stormy.

"I don't want you to be beholden to Deem," he explained, five minutes later, out in the barn, shortening the stirrups on a roan pony for the boy. "But Kerry's true as the North Star—you'll always know where you stand with her."

The words were graven deep on Stormy's memory—as was every phase of this his first ride with Trinidad.

Through the gold of the midsummer afternoon they climbed up the steep trail that followed Rainbow River to Bright Angel Heights. High in the wilds above the Flying Star! High above everything, it seemed to Stormy! For all the world seemed spread below. Miles upon miles of dun prairies. More miles of foothills in varying shades of green. So many, that the boy thought surely he would see as far back as Saint Louis, as far on as Spokane. So high, that the jagged peaks were all that were above him; these, and the stainless blue of the Montana sky.

"High above every trouble," the old man told him. "I always come up here to git shed of mine. For there ain't none here—but what folks bring with 'em. It's wild-hoss country, son."

Wild-horse country! Stormy's spirits soared higher than the peaks. Soon he

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would have a horse of his own, and be on his way to Spokane. He was as excited as though he had already started. And for the first time he talked freely of Red Streak, and told Dad Dorn just what pals he and the race horse had been. For the pain of separation was behind, and he was looking forward to a joyful reunion with his chum.

"I'll bet he misses me!" he would cry happily. "I'll bet he'll be glad to see me!"

All the while he kept a sharp lookout, pulling up every few yards to point at some far object. "Is that a wild horse?" he would ask. And when Trinidad identified it as a rock, or stump, or snag, he would immediately point out something else and inquire: "Is that one, Dad?"

His companion, smiling at his enthusiasm, said:

"We won't see one—ridin' open like this. They'd see us first. You could ride for days an' never git a peek at one, unless it was plumb accident. For they're cute, son. They can see, an' hear, an' smell, an' run farther than anything. But we'll hide up here near Beaver Springs, an' we'll mebbe see one when they come to drink."

A high mile more they jogged through the hushed bigness of the land, talking, as only kindred spirits talk, with no reserve, letting the sun in on things long buried in the heart.

"I won't let folks run the wild boys," Dad said naïvely. "I got no right to stop 'em—but I'm gittin' away with it. An' I feel that mustangs know me. Fool notion, but I like to feel so."

Nothing foolish about that to Stormy.

"I'll bet they do!" warmly he backed Dad up. "Horses is smart, you bet! I used to do things for Red Streak, an' he knew. Once I dug a stone out of his hoof, an' he rubbed his cheek on me to say 'thank you.'"

Dad nodded seriously. "They're smart, all right! They don't know the stockmen hereabouts is bent on gittin' rid of 'em—but they know enough to be afraid of men."

"Dad"—Stormy had been puzzled by this, since Deem's outbreak the night he came—"why do they want to get rid of them?"

"Because they want the earth!" flared the old fellow bitterly. "Not so long ago, this was all wild-horse country—plain, as well as mountain. Men took the plains, an' the wild boys moved back into the hills. Then man lifted his eyes to the hills, an' wanted 'em, too. An' there ain't no place left for the wild boys to go! But for me," he added, more in sorrow than in anger, "they'd have been killed off long ago!"

"Killed?" The boy's black eyes devoured Trinidad.

"Massacred!" The old man trembled in righteous wrath. "Rounded up an' shot down in droves, or driv off to the packers——" He broke off at Stormy's cry of horror. Mustn't shock the lad; didn't think he'd savvy that! But his indignation burst from him in another rush of words:

"What won't man do for the almighty dollar! They want to kill the mustangs, which ain't profitable, to make room for beef, which is. They're makin' life a burden to me. Ain't a day but Deem pesters me! He says I'm selfish—to hold out agin' the majority. Says I'm crazy. Mebbe I am! Mebbe it is crazy to wish to see livin' things about, which you don't want to kill or use! I notice the majority ain't struck that way! But man don't live by bread alone—an' I won't care to be livin' when the wild boys is gone!"

Completely carried away, he pulled up on the leafy trail beside the boy, who was just as distressed as he. "It's their country!" he cried, in trembling passion. "Why don't we go—make room for them? Why don't some one knock us in the head?

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"Look, son!" he cried, flinging an arm out at the mighty mountain wall about. "See how these hills cup in? Natural boundaries to a natural pasture—fifty miles square. or more. See this bunch grass, everywhere? Grass an' water—they can't tell me there ain't a purpose in it! It's God's Corral!"

Stirred by his words, burning with sympathy, Stormy looked. And, then and thereafter, that vast, broken bowl of hill and vale was to him just what it was to Trinidad.

"But I foxed 'em," Dad bragged, as they rode on again. "I seen this comin', an' I run a whizzer on 'em. I bought these hills—with my own money, too. Deem ain't a pardner in it."

"You bought this?" The boy was dazed by the prospect. "Dad, you own all—God's Corral?"

"Waal, no," Trinidad admitted. "But I just the same as own it all. You see, son, I bought patches, here an' there—a block of land about every spring, a strip both sides of every creek. I bought water! An' without water this land's no use to 'em. So I control this range. Stockmen can meet an' legislate agin' the mustangs all they danged please, but they can't kill 'em off. I'll fight that as long as God gives me life!"

The boy's eyes worshiped him. Dad Dorn was now, and was ever to be, Stormy's hero. His cause was a noble cause. This talk was to bear heavily on all his after life, to call forth his bitter sacrifice. Exalted by it now, he said eagerly:

"Gee, I wish I could help! If it wasn't for Red Streak——"

"I wish you could!" fervently broke in Trinidad. "It's just greed with them now. But there'll come a time when they need this range—there'll come a show-down! An' the bitterest fight on earth is a range fight. I don't know where I'll git the heart for it alone. I'm old, son—plumb weary of janglin'. I feel like I'd shot my bolt. It'll take young blood to save my mustangs.

"But," he went on, more in his old tone, touched by the sharp concern for him on the young face. "just knowin' there's another in the world like me has bucked me up a—— What's that?"

Abruptly, at this shocked exclamation, he pulled his horse up, his lean body stiffening in the saddle, his gentle face suffused with anger. And, following Dad's angry eyes, Stormy saw.

Wild horses! No need for tongue to tell him, nor any previous glimpse of them, for they were as unlike any horses he had ever seen as a sculptured Indian is unlike the living brave. And he leaned forward, with parted lips, and hammering heart, and dark eyes lit with wondering awe, while that wild band, streaming down the slope far ahead, warned by some sight or scent of them, veered sharply to the left, running around the base of the mountain. The horses ran with a freedom that had never known a fetter, with high pride in their fleetness, with flying grace that made them seem to skim the earth and touch it nowhere, with their long manes and tails floating out like banners in the never-tired wind that blew up here. Far away, they were, and getting farther, yet——

The boy's gaze fell on the flying leader, and every drop of blood drained from his face. His dilated eyes, riveted on the animal, failed to see the cause of the old man's wrath—six riders in hot pursuit of the flying band.

"Hoss hunters!" exclaimed old Trinidad. "Thought they could run 'em, an' I wouldn't know! By mighty, they'll hear from me!"

Sinking his spurs in, he plunged wildly after the horses, with Stormy wilder far than he. So wild was the boy that when, on second sober thought, Dad would stop, he had to seize Stormy's bridle and drag him to

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a halt by main force. And even then the boy fought to be gone, kicking his horse's sides, screaming frantically:

"Let me go, Dad! Let me go!"

"Why, you little fire-eater!" cried Dad Dorn, rejoicing at this spirit. "Don't you see—we couldn't catch 'em! They got a mile start now. Mustn't let our hearts stampede our wits. The band will run around that hill. We'll cut through the pass, an' head 'em off."

But Stormy was crazy to be after the flying band, afraid they would miss them. How could Dad be so sure? Agonizing at every step, he went with him. He was bitterly disappointed, when, an hour later, on the mustang trail at the base of Thunder Mountain, they met the riders instead of the wild band. A dusty, weary, sober lot of men these were, walking their foaming horses, and looking guilty as a pack of sheep-killing hounds when they saw Trinidad Dorn.

"Lark" Hoyt, of the Buckhorn Ranch, comically threw up his hands in mock surrender.

"Don't shoot, Trin," he grinned. "We've got a alibi."

"It better be good!" Dad said grimly, pressing up.

"We wasn't after your fuzztail pets."

"Then what was you after, Lark?"

The Buckhorn man pushed back his hat. "Gosh all fishhooks! I hardly know what—— A whirlwind, I reckon. We've been runnin' him in relays since last night. Whoever named him, sure knew——"

"What the Sam Hill are you talkin' about?"

"That race horse!" explained Hoyt. "Didn't you hear about the wreck? The westbound freight went into the ditch this side o' Rawhide, an'—— Say, what's wrong with the kid?"

For Stormy had cried out. Quickly, Trinidad put his arm about him. "Go on, Lark."

"The fast freight was wrecked yesterday, an' three race horses was killed outright. But one—Red Streak, they called him—got away. Colonel Seivers, the owner, who was takin' 'em to Spokane, hot-foots it to the Buckhorn, an' drafts my crew to run him down. We picked up his trail last night an' followed it to within three miles of here, but lost it when dark come on. Late to-day, we picked it up again. He'd got in with a wild band, an' we've been runnin' him ever since."

"Oh, I knew him!" Stormy was in ecstasies. "I seen him! Oh, Dad, I knew it was Red Streak!" Rapturously, he turned to Hoyt. "Did you get him?"

The man looked at him curiously. "Yeah—in a way," he admitted ruefully. "It's how we got him that worries me! He lit out with them fuzztails like nobody's business. Freedom went plumb to his head, or perhaps he couldn't put on the brakes fast enough. Anyhow, he just run over the bluff back here in Siwash Canyon an' broke his neck!"

Shocked by the bald and brutal way the news had been broken, Dad's arm tightened pityingly about the boy. But, though white as death, Stormy whimpered.

Not until the Buckhorn men had gone—keenly remorseful, when the tragedy had been explained to them—and he and Trinidad had found, on the rocks below Siwash Bluff, the broken form of the once glorious race horse, for whom the call of the wild had been the call of death did the tears come.

They came wildly, then, as Stormy pressed the slim, satiny head to his breast, in pitiful reunion, in final separation. To the orphan, Red Streak had been home, family, friends. On bitter nights his body had warmed the boy; the affectionate nuzzle of his sleek cheek had been the waif's one love-touch. All that horse can be to man, Red Streak had been to Stormy.

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And Trinidad Dorn—one of the lucky few who knew how very much that could be—respecting the boy's bitter loss, sat apart, waiting for the first sharp grief to pass, his own eyes dim, his own heart aching.

The sun sank, lighting on every soaring crag and pinnacle a fire that reached the sky and spread in sheets of flame. It had burned itself out, and the heights were veiled in dusk, when Stormy came to him.

"He won't be lonesome," said the old man huskily, his hand groping for the boy's. "My mustangs will keep him company. He couldn't rest in a grander place. Come, son, we'll mound the rocks up over him, to keep him safe."

Between dusk and dark they accomplished this. Then they mounted and rode away, leaving Red Streak in God's Corral—which was thereafter, to be for Stormy, too, a refuge, shrine, and sanctuary. For, on the very spot, where—when he was a wanderer again, and Dad Dorn a memory—he was to see the form and spirit of Red Streak running free, Stormy said, out of the dark: "I'll help you fight for the wild boys, Dad. I'll stay."

Deep-toned, came the old man's answer. "I reckon God willed it that way."

CHAPTER IV.

"I CAN RIDE HIM!"

WHERE'S that kid?"

Deem Dorn shot that query at his brother when, one sultry afternoon about a week after the death of the race horse, he came upon him mending fence in the upper pasture.

"Why ain't he here helpin'?" he growled, getting down to coil the bits of rusty barbed wire that Trin was discarding. "If he was worth his salt, he'd do what he could to pay for his keep!"

"I don't need him," said mild old Trin. "Besides, I don't want he should feel like hired help."

Deem's lips thinned, but he held his tongue. And, thinking his brother was becoming reconciled to Stormy at last, Trinidad dropped his hammer, and, hitching comfortably back on his heels, put in an earnest plea for him.

"Deem, you don't half savvy what that lad's been up against, with no home, no folks to look out for him, an' kicked from pillar to post, like he's been. It plumb scares me yet to think where he'd be now, if he hadn't been throwed off that freight train! They say that car was smashed to kindlin'. It's a miracle how Red Streak escaped alive. Stormy would 'a' been killed sure, Deem."

"Mebbe the best thing that could have happened to him," was the heartless retort.

Trinidad was deeply shocked. "Deem, you don't mean that!"

"Don't fool yourself! I'm tellin' you again—he's bad medicine. His raisin' would make him that, if nothing else. But his blood——"

"He's a thoroughbred!" Dad Dorn was getting mad. "All that abuse didn't break his spirit, didn't make him a whiner, or a sneak. I found him 'most starvin' to death, an' in rags, but he wasn't ashamed of it. He knew he couldn't help it. An' he stood up to me like a man. No cringe to him."

"Oh, he's bold all right—bold as brass!" Deem turned, picking up his reins, masking the secret fire in his light-blue eyes. "By the way, where's he hidin' out these days?"

Trinidad shot him a keen glance. "Why?"

"Oh, I notice he's makin' himself mighty scarce. Never around with the men. Just mopes off alone, showin' up for his meals like a sullen hound. Why ain't he down watchin' Bronc—like a he-kid would be?"

"Because," said Trinidad, setting a staple in the post, and driving it in with a husky lick, "he's grievin' about

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Red Streak. The boys know that—an' we ain't forcin' company on him, when he wants to be alone."

But Deem Dorn put a different, sinister construction upon it. "He's up to some deviltry!" he charged venomously. "Mark my word—that lad will bear watchin'. Look out for the brat that herds alone!"

But both brothers were wrong in their surmise as to how Stormy was putting in his time. And it would have given both an equal jolt to have known what he was doing. For he was not stealing off to grieve. Nor, after the first two days, had he been alone.

Kerry Dorn, keenly interested in the boy who had saved her life, had been first to miss Stormy. She had quickly noticed his strange disappearances, observed how he struck off by himself several times each day, and was not seen for hours, and how he always went in the same direction, and invariably paid a visit to the horse barn first!

Feminine curiosity getting the better of her, she intercepted him there one morning, as he was leaving with—she could not help but see—every pocket bulging. Wistfully, she asked Stormy where he was going.

"No place—much," he blurted, trying to sidle past her.

It sounded thrilling to Kerry. "Wait, Stormy!" she pleaded. "Can't I go, too?"

"No!" he cried fearfully. "You'd spoil everything!"

"Why, I would not!" Kerry was hurt. "I wouldn't do a thing you didn't want me to. Please—I get so lonely!"

"But they'd miss you!" he explained helplessly, with many a nervous glance about. "They'd hunt me up, an' find out——"

"Find out what?" breathlessly she prompted, her blue eyes wide.

"What I'm doin'," the boy evaded. "Your father would stop me. An' I mustn't be stopped now."

"I won't tell him!" promised Kerry, pushing back her soft hair, and smiling at him—that frank, honest smile, so much like her Uncle Trin's. "I can keep a secret, Stormy—you'll see! Please let me go with you."

His black eyes fairly searched her soul. "Cross your heart, you won't tell!" he demanded.

With all solemnity, Kerry vowed.

Then Stormy looked furtively around, made sure that the coast was clear, and, in the lordly way of a small man with a maid, beckoned with his head: "Come along, then."

Kerry vanished with him, and spent most of her waking hours for the next two weeks with Stormy. And when she was at home, she went around with an air so excited and mysterious that it was a wonder they were not detected sooner.

But one day, while they were in the barn, busy with their mysterious preparations, Deem Dorn stalked in. And, seeing them together, Deem's face was not pleasant to look upon. Hoarsely ordering Kerry to the house, he confronted the boy alone—glad in his implacable soul of any excuse to vent his hate for him.

"Now, you scamp," he thundered, "what's goin' on?"

Stormy paled at the look in the man's eye, but bravely stood his ground.

"Kick through!" Roughly Deem jerked him around.

To tell after such treatment would have been interpreted as fear, and Stormy would rather have been killed. Outraged by the violent touch of that man's hands, he cried: "I won't! I don't have to!"

"Oh, you don't!" snarled Deem, yanking him off his feet, and shaking him viciously. "You don't, huh?"

The boy's black eyes blazed out of a dead-white face. "No—I—don't!" he gasped, with magnificent defiance. "You—ain't—my—boss!"

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With an oath, Deem dropped him, and in that mad impulse of his kind to destroy what it can't control snatched up the buggy whip that lay over the feed box. No cringe to him? Well, he'd see! Mercilessly, the lash snapped back——

It was caught in a tense brown hand, and jerked from Deem's grasp! Trinidad stepped between the boy and his persecutor.

"That will do, Deem!" Trin's cold tone was in strange contrast to the fire raging in his eyes. "That'll do—now, an' for all time! Don't ever lay hands on this boy again!"

But Deem's temper was running wild. "I don't intend to! I don't aim to take any more of his sass. He's clearin' out now!" He waved an arm at the boy, as though by that gesture to sweep him out. "Get goin'—pronto!"

But Trinidad held Stormy.

"Deem"—his fiery eyes held his brother's—"let's have this out! Stormy ain't goin'—no time. This is his home. An' you can like it, or lump it. Savvy?"

"You mean"—that firm stand stunned Deem—"you'd force me to keep that brat? To take back talk from him?"

"It's me that's keepin' him." Again Trinidad reminded his brother that he had some interest in the ranch. "An' you couldn't expect any other answer from a kid with spunk."

Grimly, Deem gave in. "All right!" His mean mouth curved with a cruel grin. "I wash my hands of him. But Kerry's mine. Keep your tramp away from her, or there'll be trouble."

As well might Deem Dorn, or any one, try to keep the sun from the foam on Rainbow River!

Deem stalked off. Then the boy—who had faced him with defiance to the last—fell tremblingly against Dad. And the old man, shaken himself, explained how Kerry had run straight to him with word that Deem had Stormy cornered in the barn. Now Dad asked, with mild curiosity:

"Just what have you been up to, son?"

"It ain't nothing bad!" Stormy sobbed. "I'll tell you, if you want me to. But me an' Kerry—we wanted it for a secret!"

Dad's face melted into its old gentle lines. "Then you keep it, son."

That hot July night, as they were stretched out in the cool grass, under the willows and early stars, the boy said, with a pitiful catch in his voice. "Dad, I'd better clear out, I guess."

Dad looked at him in alarm. "Don't ever think of that! I won't let him touch you again."

"Shucks!" Stormy scorned. "Whose afraid of him? But I—I'm makin' you trouble."

"You stayed to help me with my trouble!" cried the old man earnestly. "Don't forget we're pardners! Don't forget the big thing we're workin' for—to save the wild boys up there!"

And, in the fear they shared, their gaze sought the hills—now night-veiled, dim, and mysterious. Well for both that a veil was drawn over the future, too! But the man must have been trying to pierce that veil, for, softly, he asked:

"You an' Kerry hit it off pretty well, don't you?"

"Sure," owned Stormy shyly. "She ain't like other girls. She likes horses, an' she's true blue. She's just like you."

And no compliment had ever pleased Trinidad so much.

Long after Stormy had gone to bed, he sat out there, wondering what the youngsters' secret could be, and planning for them in an old man's way. He was still out there, when Bronc Craig slouched through the gloom, and, without encouragement or invitation, flung down on the grass beside him.

"Better git a ringside seat for to-

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morrow, Trin," he writhed over to announce. "There's sure goin' to be fur flyin' around this ranch."

"How's that, Bronc?" Dad asked civilly.

"Why," boasted the horse-breaker, "me an' that Sultan hoss goes to the mat! An' I'm bettin' dollars to doughnuts, it won't be me which takes the count!"

The glitter in his slitted eyes brought Dad up with a jolt. "Is the hoss healed?"

"Yeah—an' full of dynamite!"

So Trinidad was not surprised by the wrangler's laconic mention, at breakfast next morning, of his having transferred Sultan from the remote pasture where he had been convalescing back to the breaking pen. Nor did he see the effect of that news on Stormy. But when, almost immediately, a waddy let out a wild whoop from the steps for every one to pile out on the double-quick, or they'd miss the fun, for Bronc had got Sultan roped, and the horse was "churning dust," Dad was surprised to note that Stormy was the first one out.

Amazed by this sudden interest in Bronc's activities, Dad rushed out himself to see that little pair of cut-down chaps leading all the rest in the grand stampede for the corral—where the outlaw was doing his best to murder Bronc, who again had a rope on his neck.

Dashing up, Trinidad saw Stormy on the corral top, tilted dangerously over the fighting horse, shrilly commanding Bronc to stop, seemingly almost beside himself as the breaker—repeating his former successful trick—flipped the rope about the striking forefeet, whipped it over the outlaw's back, and, by a sudden tug, threw the helpless animal flat.

Then, to the horror of that tense line-up at the fence, Stormy jumped into the ring! Deaf to their shouts, he leaped the thrashing beast, hurling himself in inexplicable, white-hot rage on Bronc, actually sending the man sprawling before the force and fury of his whirlwind attack. The boy was upon Craig in a flash, his eyes blazing dangerously, his face white, beating him with his small fists, kicking, and raging.

Meanwhile, Kerry made a literal blue streak from the house; her father watched this display of savage temper with much satisfaction; and Trinidad and Cherokee, seeing the danger Craig and Stormy were in, as the outlaw struggled to his feet, rushed in to separate them.

"What the Sam Hill!" yelled Trinidad, pulling the furious lad from Bronc and out of the reach of Sultan, who, oddly enough, had made no hostile move toward them. "Great guns, son, why did you tie into Bronc?"

"I told him to quit!" panted the little fury, still looking daggers at Bronc. "He wouldn't, Dad! He was scarin' Sultan—makin' him mean!"

"But Sultan's bad," Dad tried to soothe him. "He's got to be handled rough.

"No, he don't!" cried Stormy fiercely. "He ain't bad—unless he's made to be!"

"Loco!" Deem jeered. "Waal, Trin, I told you so. You will pick up everything. See what you got in your prize package this time!"

Bronc Craig, dusting his back, glared approval of these sentiments. But Trinidad gave no sign of hearing. He was pathetic in his bewilderment.

"Sultan's an outlaw, son," patiently he explained. "He's the worst hoss ever seen in these parts. He ain't ever been backed. Nobody's been able to do a thing with him yet."

"Yes, they have!" Eagerly Stormy tugged at Dad. "I can do anything with him!"

"Loco is right!" hooted Bronc, with a wink at Deem.

And even the loyal Flying Star crew thought it must be something like that.

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But Trinidad caught the triumphant glance that Kerry and Stormy exchanged, and his heart beat fast. The kids had some secret——

"Wait!" cried Stormy, wriggling out of Dad's grasp. "I'll show you what Sultan will do for me!"

Before any one could stop him, he was across the corral, slowing his pace as he neared the big outlaw, softly crooning some unintelligible jargon that barely reached them.

They saw the great, black brute—still trembling with fury at his recent encounter with Bronc—shy back a few steps. They saw the boy, still with that low, weird chant, fearlessly following him. And they saw—each wondering if the other did, or if his own eyes were playing the most fantastic tricks—Stormy's hand go up to the twitching lips, lie there a second, then slide up over the wickedly flatted ears and down the stiff neck. And they saw—with dazed awe—Sultan's small ears lift, his taut neck arch, as he relaxed, bent his head, and rooted lovingly beneath the boy's arm!

"He's after oats!" Stormy called proudly. "He knows I've got 'em! I take him oats every day. I started in right after he was hurt. He was awful afraid to touch them at first. But I just left them an' went away, an' pretty soon he come back and ate them. An' he let me doctor him. Kerry helped me. Why, he'd whinney like anything to see us comin'! Didn't you, Sultan?"

He paused to pet the big brute like a dog. Then, as if he had not sufficiently stunned them, Stormy threw his bombshell:

"I can ride him!"

"Honest—he can!" In her excitement, Kerry danced on the fence. "Sultan won't let me touch him. But he'll let Stormy do anything!"

Before even Trinidad could forbid, the boy jumped up, tangled his hands in the long, black mane, braced a knee against the twitching shoulder, and scrambled up on the outlaw's back. Sultan stiffened, and terrible fear shot through Trinidad. Then a groan of relief burst from his lips. For the big black, looking around at the little figure, suddenly tossed up his head and trotted to and fro, along the opposite side of the corral, now perfectly docile!

"A miracle!" said Cherokee huskily.

"There's a trick in it somewhere!" fumed Bronc Craig.

"Yeah," flashed the foreman, with biting sarcasm, "a trick you ain't learned yet!"

But Trinidad Dorn, wild with joy that this gift of gifts should belong to the boy who was to help him in his life's struggle, exclaimed with tremulous reverence:

"It's a God-given genius with hosses! I never seen but one or two men in my life with that control!"

And he swung to Deem, who, silenced for once, was as awe-stricken as any of them. "The boy's earned that hoss," he said curtly. "What will you take for your interest in Sultan, so I can give him to Stormy?"

Deem reddened—shamed by this public assumption that he would be niggardly. Forced to yield, rather than give proof of his meanness, he said, cryptically:

"I got no interest in that hoss."

So, at the Flying Star, the loom of life went on, weaving a bond of love between Stormy and Sultan; another, stronger than the tie of blood, between Stormy and Trinidad Dorn; a third, with threads of purest gold, between "Deem's girl" and "Trin's boy," weaving in the tenacious, black warp of Deem Dorn's selfish hate for Stormy, weaving doom for the wild mustangs.

Until that May Day, when Stormy was a man and, suddenly, the whole tragic pattern was complete!

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

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Catch 'Em Alive

By Howard E. Morgan

Author of "Last Kick," etc.

PETER HICKS, the acting sheriff of Yavapai County, was a little man—short, bald, and softly fat. The nickname of "Hickory Pete" had been invented by frequenters of O'Leary's saloon in Dixville who had nothing better to do. Hickory Pete did sound funny, though, when applied to Peter Hicks. He was, in appearance at least, anything but the virile, hard-handed individual which the name implied.

Since Sheriff Ed McConnville's removal to Helena, where his rheumatism was being baked out of him by various high-priced doctors, Hickory Pete Hicks had spent most of his time dozing in the cushioned chair in the sheriff's office. It was the low altitude that made him sleepy, he explained. Which may have been the truth at that, although nobody believed it.

"Too fat, an' jest plumb lazy," was the way "Link" O'Leary put it. Most people agreed with Link.

When faced with Peter Hicks' dimpled smile and roly-poly body, it was difficult to think anything else. Conjecture had, of course, been rife as to what the rotund little officer would do if faced with a situation calling for the services of a sure-enough he-sheriff. For the first time, these conjecturers realized that Yavapai County had for several years been pretty tame. Of course, Ed McConnville had been responsible for this to a great extent. Despite his frequent attacks of rheumatism, Ed McConnville had been a good man, respected by evil-doers and honest men alike. The chances were that McConnvilles' reputation would serve to keep things quiet in Yavapai County—and Dixville, specifically—for some time. There appeared, then, to be little

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chance of Hickory Pete having much of anything to do in the immediate future. This seemed too bad to those critical individuals who found so many really funny things to laugh at in Peter Hicks. If something only would happen!

And something did happen. The happening was instigated by those reckless, carefree sons of the range, cowpunchers employed by the Triple Z and Circle M ranches. True enough, the excitement was started by the Triple Z and Circle M cow pokes; but—to their shame be it said—these young men did not finish what they started.

Peter Hicks was dozing, as usual, in the bright spring sunshine behind the cracked window of the sheriff's office, when the fireworks began. Perhaps fireworks is not the right word. It really sounded like a bombardment. A dozen or more six-guns within split seconds of each other inside a big room, sound very much like the roar of heavy artillery presaging a sure-enough battle.

The little sheriff jerked to attention and stared through the dingy window. A half grin wreathed his dimpled cheeks. His first thought was that the cowboys, he knew they were in town, had delivered a salvo into the air in front of his office by way of a little joke. Peter Hicks did not know much about the range. Hence, he did not know cowboys very well. But he did know a joke when he saw or heard one. His round red face was always ready to break into a smile at the slightest excuse.

He was vaguely puzzled when he saw that the street was deserted. Then, he noticed smoke drifting through the swinging doors of O'Leary's saloon. Immediately after Link O'Leary pushed himself through the doors and ran down the street, waving his arms wildly.

Peter Hicks got nimbly to his feet. "Told him that's what would happen," he muttered, as he buckled on his gun belt. "Mebbe he don't sell them boys hard liquor; but they gits it, an' they drinks it, in his place. An' he knows it. Likely they got lit up some an' are shootin' his place up. 'Tain't their fault, altogether. It's as much his fault as theirs."

Following which righteous soliloquy, the acting Sheriff of Yavapai County lumbered down the street to meet Link O'Leary.

Things had happened about as Hickory Pete had guessed except that O'Leary swore the boys had not had anything to drink.

"Yes, yes, I know," the sheriff said. "Yes, yes, of course. But you can't expect me t'do anythin' about it. They're young an' full o' fun. Just did it t' git you mad, prob'ly. But, I'll talk to 'em——"

Assuming an important swagger that set ludicrously upon his stubby figure, Peter preceded Link O'Leary along the dusty street and pushed boldly into the saloon.

The big square room was blue with powder smoke. With his mouth half open, prepared to deliver the scathing lecture which he had concocted on the spur of the moment, as it were, the little sheriff opened his mouth still wider and coughed. He started to speak again. This time, the acrid smoke attacked his nose. He sneezed violently, again and again. Seemingly unmindful of the laughter, he found a red bandanna in his hip pocket and wiping away the moisture that had come to his eyes, he turned a serious face to the grinning culprits.

"Boys," he began, "you should oughtta know better——"

A roaring explosion cut him off, and a heavy six-gun slug crashed through the front window of the saloon a few feet away. Peter Hicks' placid face assumed a pained expression.

"Now, listen," he said, "that there is just plain vandalism. Whoever done that should oughtta pay Mr. O'Leary fer that winder. An' what's more——"

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Once again, the officer's speech was interrupted.

The grinning crowd of cow-punchers grouped about the bar suddenly burst asunder. Out through the opening thus formed came a long-limbed, red-headed puncher on hands and feet. Astride the red-headed one's back was a little bowlegged fellow, who, yelling at the top of his lungs, slapped his embryo steed with his hat and dug imaginary spurs into his "horse's" ribs. Straight toward the swinging doors, and Sheriff Peter Hicks, the red-haired clown bore his rider. Peter Hicks danced nimbly aside. But he did not move quite quickly enough. One of the horse's feet caught his foot. Hickory Pete swung half about and fell, with a grunt, flat upon his back on the sawdust-covered floor.

When he clambered to his feet a few seconds later, the last of the laughing conspirators was just disappearing through a back door.

Link O'Leary, wearing a serious mien as befitted the occasion, was meticulously polishing the big redwood bar, which still stood—presumably as an ornament—along one side of the room. For a long minute Peter Hicks looked at O'Leary. Very slowly, then, he brushed the sawdust off his clothes, and without a word turned away. Just as he reached the street, a billowing dust-cloud swept by. Without looking, Peter Hicks knew that that cloud contained the entire personnel of the Circle M Ranch, plus some Triple Z men. Shouts and laughter emanated from the cloud as it hurried by. Peter Hicks did not look up until it was gone. Then he raised his eyes and watched it out of sight. When he clumped back to his office a few minutes later, his eyes were twinkling and there was just the least suspicion of a smile agitating his fat cheeks.

The little man had hardly settled himself in the comfortable chair behind the sheriff's desk when the phone rang. This was the first time the telephone had sounded since he had come to Dixville, a month since. Surprised, Hickory Pete rose and took the dusty instrument down from the wall. A gasping voice came to him over the wire.

"Sheriff! Come quick! O'Leary——" A dismal groan followed.

Peter Hicks waited, an expectant smile twitching the corners of his mouth. "Yes, go on," he invited. The Triple Z boys this time, eh?"

There was no response.

For a minute Peter Hicks waited, then he replaced the receiver on the hook. He stood there for a time, laughing.

But the smile was gone from his face when he returned to his cushioned chair. Although always willing to laugh, he had really seen nothing particularly funny in the little farce which Link O'Leary had just enacted for his benefit. Or was it a farce? In the act of reclining in the comfortable chair, Peter Hicks hesitated and finally pulled himself erect. He looked out of the window just in time to see three horsemen ride away from the back of O'Leary's place. None of the men wore chaps. All three carried rifles. That was queer. As they went, they looked back frequently.

Peter Hicks went into action. He caught up a new Winchester rifle from behind the door, and standing in the office doorway sent two shots over the heads of the three horsemen. If he had expected them to stop, he was to be disappointed. The first two men put spurs to their horses and hurried on. The third turned in his stirrups, swung his rifle about, and sent three shots crashing into the air. One of the bullets thudded into the door jamb six inches from Peter Hicks' head. The little officer did not even blink. Instead, something very much like an oath came from his full lips. He lifted the rifle again. But he did not fire. The three horsemen were

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already too far away to allow for accurate shooting.

Reloading his rifle as he went, Peter Hicks, hurried down the street toward O'Leary's saloon. As he approached the saloon, a little man with amazingly bowed legs approached from the opposite direction. Hicks recognized the little man as Zack Edwards, foreman of the Circle M Ranch.

"Whut was all the shootin' fer, sheriff?" Edwards called. Hicks did not pause to reply. He went up the three steps to the porch of O'Leary's saloon and waddled inside.

Zack Edwards hesitated for a moment, then followed.

At first glance the saloon appeared to be empty. Then, a half-opened door leading into what was apparently a closet or storeroom attracted Peter Hicks' attention. That door was in splinters.

Evidently, it had been battered open. Six-gun in hand, the sheriff pushed on into the little storeroom. He saw O'Leary, then.

There was another door leading into that closet or storeroom or whatever it was; this door, communicated with what was, apparently, O'Leary's bedroom. Link O'Leary lay face down across the foot of his bed. One hand still held the telephone receiver, which had been pulled loose from its moorings on the wall near the bed.

Peter Hicks picked the unconscious man up in his arms and laid him on the bed. Hurried inspection disclosed two painful bruises, one just behind the saloonkeeper's ear, the other on top of his head.

"Concussion, mebbe," Hicks muttered to himself. He turned then with evident surprise, to find Zack Edwards at his side.

"Naw," the old ranchman grunted, "no concussion there, sheriff. Link O'Leary's got the thickest skull I ever seen. Why, I remember one time——"

But Peter Hicks had gone. He returned almost immediately bearing a wooden bucket half filled with water, and an ancient towel.

A few minutes later Link O'Leary bore out Zack Edwards' statement about the hardness of his head by recovering consciousness and full possession of all his senses at the same instant. With his first breath, he began to swear. He cursed long and skillfully. Zack Edwards listened with undisguised admiration.

"Didn't think you had it in you, Link," he muttered.

But Hicks did not seem to be particularly impressed. "Save your breath, O'Leary," he finally interrupted. "Tell us what happened. Did they git anythin'? Who were they?"

O'Leary swallowed hard several times, then effectually choking the curses that still demanded utterance. "Twelve hundred dollars, that's what they got!" he almost shouted "Twelve hundred dollars! Every cent I had in the world. Why the low-down, sneakin' coyotes. They took——"

"Did you recognize 'em?" Peter Hicks interrupted.

"Sure," O'Leary answered promptly. "It was the old Sabor gang—Monty Sabor himself an' 'Ace' LeVine, Sabor's prize gunman."

"But there were three of 'em," the sheriff prompted.

"Yeah, I know. The other feller's name is Culp. He's a bad one, too. Looks just like a big monkey, Culp does. He's as strong as two ordinary men. LeVine, o' course, does all the trick shootin'. Sabor is the brains of the gang."

For a minute Peter Hicks seemed lost in thought.

Link O'Leary went on. "I recognized 'em—all three of 'em—the moment they came in. The place was empty ye see, the Circle M an' the Triple Z boys all havin' started fer home. First

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off, I really didn't expect trouble. Didn't seem possible that Sabor could've learned of McConnville's absence so soon. Sabor ain't put foot in Yavapai County since Ed McConnville's been sheriff. He knew better. Him an' his gang has been operatin' most o' the time just over the border in Canada. Pickin's must've got kinda slim up there. He heard, somehow, about Ed's trouble an' came hotfootin' it back over the border. Still an' all, they was kinda careful. They didn't do no shootin'. As I say, I wasn't lookin' fer trouble, first off."

O'Leary paused and caressed his sore head with gentle fingers. "First thing I knew," he went on finally, "LeVine pulled a gun an' cracked me one. It was an awful wallop. I dropped right enough. But I wasn't out. They thought I was, though. They went about their business, pryin' open the cash drawer just like they was plumb sure I was out o' the runnin' fer sometime t' come. But I was only dizzy. I crawled along behind the bar, ducked into that storeroom, an' shut an' locked the door behind me before they saw me. They was on the job, then, in a hurry. I got t' the 'phone an' was just able t' talk t' you some when Culp busted through the door an' handed me another wallop."

Hicks had listened with seeming impatience to O'Leary's story. He turned to Zack Edwards. "You know this country pretty well, Edwards," he said. "Where would those fellers head for?"

Zack Edwards paused to shift a huge cud of tobacco to the opposite side of his mouth before answering. "Sagamore Mountain," he said.

"Are you sure?" the sheriff persisted.

"Absolute," the old ranchman said. "Sabor is a smart one, like Link says. Although there might not be no sheriff in Yavapai County—t'speak of, that is—he wouldn't take no chances. Because why? There's lots o' fellers who are right handy with six-guns an' who would be glad o' the chance t' tackle him for the money he's worth. Our boys an' the Triple Z fellers got together last time an' helped Ed McConnville drive Sabor outta the State. An' so, like I say, Monty, he'd make for Sagamore Mountain. The three of 'em, Sabor, LeVine, and Culp, could hold out there against a small army for a long time. Y'see, sheriff, he knows this country, Sabor does. He knows the Sagamore Hills, too. He——"

"The Sagamore Hills it is, then," Peter Hicks interrupted brusquely. "Twelve hundred dollars, you say, O'Leary? Well, we will see what we can do about gittin' it back fer you." And, adjusting his gun belt, he started away.

Zack Edwards suddenly jerked to attention. "Hey!" he called. "Where in heck you goin'?"

Hicks stopped. Mild surprise was reflected in his round face. "Sagamore Hills," he said, "after that feller, Sabor. Why?"

"Why, you danged loon!" the old man swore "You wouldn't stand no more chance pullin' that trick alone than —than——" Suitable comparison evaded the old puncher. "Why, you just couldn't do it, that's all, sheriff. Not alone, that is. You need a posse. Twenty or thirty men."

But Hicks smilingly shook his head. "They'd only git in each other's way," he said. "I'd lots rather tackle it alone."

"But, Je-e-rusha, man!" Zack Edwards exploded. "I tell you, them hills is like a sure-enough Gibraltar. It can't be did."

Hicks shrugged. "Mebbe it will be difficult," he said; "but you remember what they told you in school, Edwards —there's no such word as 'can't."

Zack Edwards swore explosively. "Well, sir," he finally said, "you're either a danged fool, Mr. Hickory Pete, or else you're a dog-gone nervy man. But, whichever one of them is right, it

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would be plumb suicide for you t' tackle that gang single-handed. An' you ain't gonna do it——"

The old cow-puncher tightened his belt." "I'm goin' with you."

Peter Hicks considered this, face puckered, lips pursed, the picture of indecision. It was common knowledge that Zack Edwards was the fastest man in Yavapai County with those two six-guns of his.

"You ain't got nothin' t' decide," the old ranchmen said, slowly. "I'm goin' whether you want me to or not."

Peter Hicks smiled then. "All right, Zack," he said. "Let's go."

IT was midmorning of the following day when Sheriff Hickory Pete Hicks and his volunteer deputy, Zack Edwards, foreman of the Circle M Ranch, reached the base of snowcapped Sagamore Mountain. From the moment they had started, Zack had led the way. Somehow or other, the rotund little officer seemed so helpless that the old gunman's sympathies had been aroused. He had not yet decided whether Hickory was a darned fool or a brave man. It really did not matter, however. A life was a life. If the fat little cuss insisted on sticking his head into a noose, it was up to—somebody—to keep him from getting his neck stretched. It was to render this service to a fellow man that Zack Edwards was facing, willingly enough, one of the toughest jobs he had ever tackled. The old cow-puncher was under no delusions as to the danger involved. He might, with good luck, be able to save Peter Hicks' life; but, whether or not he would wriggle out of the mess into which he was heading with a whole skin was still more uncertain. Edwards was well known to Sabor and LeVine. He was recognized as a quick man with a gun and a ready and willing fighter. Sabor and his gang would take no chances, as far as Zack Edwards was concerned.

Although it was early April there was still snow in the rifts and gullies which lined Sagamore Mountain's seamy sides. The mountain was shaped almost like a perfect cone; at a distance it appeared to be banded longitudinally with irregular strips of black and white. The white was the snow lining the bottoms of the almost perpendicular gullies and canyons; the black was the rocky ridges in between. It was as though a tremendous outward pressure had been exerted inside the mountain under which the sides of the towering peak had erupted, causing huge cracks to appear on its surface.

Peter Hicks was an indifferent horseman. By the time they reached the first leg of their objective, he was evidently very tired. Despite his weariness, however, it was he who suggested that they push on into the hills.

Edwards was moved to protest, but finally he shrugged, and leading the way as usual took up the trail of the three bandits and continued.

That trail led steadily onward and upward into the hills.

"They'll have a lookout posted, sure as you're born," Edwards told himself. "We oughta wait until night, that's what."

But when this was suggested to Peter Hicks, he strenuously vetoed it. "Nothin' doin'," he said. "Stay with it, Zack. I'm with you until the end. Don't forget that!"

Shortly after midday, the trail led along a snow-clad ridge several miles back in the hills. Below on the left stretched a densely thicketed, cup-shaped valley. In fact, so accurately did that little valley form the shape of a cup that the likeness was noticeable even to Peter Hicks, with whom observation was not a strong point. The valley was perhaps a mile in width. On all sides, absolutely perpendicular walls hemmed it in.

"Y'know, sheriff," Zack Edwards

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finally said, "I got a sneakin' suspicion that we are gettin' hot, so t' speak."

Peter Hicks nodded. "Me, too," he said, "I think we're gittin' close. What's more, Zack, it seems t' me that that cup-shaped valley would be an ideal place for a hide-away."

Zack Edwards had been thinking the same thing. "Yeah," he said, "I expect you're right—I'm goin' down there, sheriff."

Hicks tried to protest. But Edwards would not listen. "Give me a piece of that rope you got," he said. "Je-e-rusha, you must have a thousand feet there! I'll drop down into the valley, d'ye see? I'll cut straight across. The chances are, I'll cut their trail some place. You foller on along around the ridge, slow like; then let down a rope for me—right straight across there on the opposite side——"

Peter Hicks argued, but old Zack was firm. The seemingly foolhardy task he had decided to undertake was based on certain knowledge that Hicks did not possess. The old cow-puncher's keen eyes had discovered that spot on the edge of the rocky, ice-covered ridge wall where the three bandits had made their way down into the valley. Almost surely the thieves would be watching that downward trail. Of course, they might be watching the rocky walls surrounding the valley, too. But the spot from which Zack Edwards had decided to descend into the valley was—due to the jagged breaks in the cliff wall—well hidden from below.

"Now, don't go lookin' for their trail," the old puncher cautioned, as he threw out the long coil of rope. "You jest poke along, slow, around the ridge. With any luck, I'll cut their trail. Pull me up, there on the other side, an' we'll talk things over. They ain't no hurry," he added. "'Tain't likely the boys will run away, particularly when they find there's only two of us."

Half an hour later Edwards pushed cautiously through the thick spruce thicket in the white valley. Under the trees the snow was still deep. It was soft and sticky and the going was slow. Within less than a quarter of a mile from the point where he had started out, Zack found what he sought—the tracks of three men in the snow. They had been leading their floundering horses. Slowly, now, the old puncher took up the trail. He peered upward, searching for Peter Hicks. The sheriff had disappeared.

"Danged loon!" Zack Edwards grunted. "Wonder if he did locate that trail leadin' down into the valley? If he did, his name is mud."

It was still there among the great trees. So still that the old puncher could hear his heart beat. Once he thought he heard the startled snort of a horse. He stopped in his tracks and listened, absolutely motionless, for ten minutes. When the sound was not repeated, he went on.

Curiously enough, the trail the old gunman was following led back toward the uprearing wall. He couldn't quite understand this. Although the valley was admirable designed for a hide-away, it seemed logical that the bandits would locate in approximately the center of that cup-shaped depression in the face of the mountain. From that point the top of that circular wall—standing out in vivid relief against the blue sky—would be clearly discernible. There was something queer about the evident trail he was following, the old man assured himself. The more he thought about it, the more certain he became that he was trailing a false lead.

Busily occupied with his thoughts, Edwards plodded on, his eyes resting on the white trail directly before him. Suddenly, there was a faint hissing sound. Like a flash, Edward's straightened tensely; his right hand flashed to the gun in his belt.

Quickly as he moved, however, he

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was not quite quick enough. A noosed rope snaking from behind a round boulder bordering the trail, settled gently over his head and shoulders and tightened about his chest, pinning both arms to his sides. He did manage to draw one gun. Even as he was yanked backward into the snow, his hooked forefinger tugged twice at the trigger, sending two shots crashing harmlessly into the near-by thicket.

Then, the gun was kicked out of his hand; he was jerked to his feet and his body enwound with strong rope.

Monty Sabor faced him, grinning.

"Sure thought an old-timer like you, Zack, would've had more sense," Sabor said. "An' what did you do with Old Hickory?"

Edwards swore feelingly. "I dunno," he said. "I dunno where he is, an' what's more, I don't care."

Sabor laughed loud and long. "How come you horned in on his party, anyhow, Zack?" he asked. "Thought your man-huntin' days was all over? You're foreman up there at the Circle M now, ain't you?"

Zack Edwards nodded miserably. "Yeah," he said, "an' I should've stayed there. Should've minded my own business. This is what you git fer hornin' in on other people's affairs. What if the fat little sheriff did git bumped off? That's what he's gittin' paid fer. My business is cows."

Monty Sabor rubbed his chin and continued to grin. "I ain't just sure what we'll do with you, Zack," he muttered, as though speaking to himself. "Expect we may have to put a slug into you before we're through."

Zack Edwards growled. "Go ahead," he invited; "an' be danged to you! Don't hear me crawlin', do you?"

But it was evident that the bandit chief had other plans. "I got it," he muttered. "Dog-gone, that sure will be rich." He broke into uproarious laughter, holding his sides with both hands. He was still laughing when, noosing a rope deftly about his captive's scrawny neck, he started through the thicket.

The bandit's camp consisted of three tents set near the bottom of the rocky wall that bordered the valley on the north. Ace LeVine, the gunman, and Culp were preparing supper when Sabor arrived with his captive.

"How about it, Zack, you old war horse," Sabor inquired, grinning. "Will you behave yourself if I untie your hands? You must be hungry, an' we got a swell feed."

"No" the old man barked. "I won't give you my word. An' I ain't hungry."

Sabor shrugged; LeVine grinned; Culp looked up from his work and sneered.

The rope that bound him was beginning to hurt; Zack knew that his hands were becoming numb. That was bad. Even if he should, by some long chance, succeed in wriggling free, he would be unable to handle a gun. The many coils of rope were shuttin off his circulation.

"Y'might loosen these here ropes a little, Sabor," he finally suggested. "I——"

But Monty Sabor appeared not to hear. His eyes were turned upward, fixed on the rocky wall directly above the camp. His companions were also looking upward. Wonderingly, Edwards followed their gaze.

At what he saw an oath escaped the old cowman's whiskered lips. Up there, almost directly above the camp, standing on the very edge of that rocky wall, was Peter Hicks. The officer held a huge coil of rope in one hand. He had fastened one end of this rope about a projecting ledge at the top of the wall. The other was tied about his waist and was looped again about his body, under his arms. Hicks was preparing to descend into the valley; and he had chosen, unhappily, the one spot in the entire valley which would render his

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foolhardy attempt a certain failure. He had picked the spot directly above the bandit's camp!

Evidently, Hicks had not seen the three tents. This was not strange, as they were gray in color and, at even a short distance, could not be told from the various boulders which jutted out of the melting snow. And he was coming down! With the rope wrapped around one leg, he swung out over the overhanging ledge, high above the valley!

Edwards groaned inwardly. "Slaughter of the innocents!" he muttered. "Oh, my gosh!"

Ace LeVine had reached for his gun, but Monty Sabor shook his head. All three men were laughing. "No need for that, Ace," Sabor said. "He'll drop right into our hands. Har, har! Ho, ho, ho! Kin you beat it? An', Zack," he went on, still laughing, "I sure gotta hand it to you. You're a game little guy to risk your neck lendin' a hand to a dumbell like that. But he don't need no guard! What he needs is a nurse."

Sabor laughed uproariously at his joke. LeVine and Culp joined in their chief's laughter. Zack Edwards gritted his teeth, shut his eyes, and swore.

Looking for all the world like a baby elephant being hoisted into a ship's hold at the end of a derrick, Peter Hicks came down the rope by fits and starts. His hat fell off. One of his gloves dropped almost at Sabor's feet. The little sheriff's bald head and round face were purple. There was no question but that he was having a hard time.

When still some fifty feet above them, the Sheriff's legs apparently became entangled in some manner with the rope. Struggling to free himself, he hung there, for a few minutes, his body revolving slowly, to the accompaniment of ludicrous writhings and strugglings.

Then, inexplicably, he worked free of the tangled rope, and started down again. For a single, breathless instant, the watching men were sure that Peter Hicks was falling. Seemingly, he dropped like a plummet. Certain it was that he slid the last fifty or seventy-five feet of that rope at amazing speed. None of the watchers, least of all Zack Edwards was prepared for what immediately followed.

Swiftly as he had moved before, Peter Hicks slowed down when within a few feet of the ground. He landed solidly on both feet, facing the little gray tents! And the instant his feet touched the ground a long-barreled six-gun appeared as though by magic in each hand. Both guns roared, the reports sounding as one.

Ace LeVine, who had been sitting cross-legged on a blanket before the camp fire, clutched at his throat and coughed. Monty Sabor spun about and collapsed in a sprawling heap in the snow.

"You, Culp, stick 'em up!" Peter Hicks barked.

The big man hesitated. With hands half raised he snatched at the gun in his belt and pulled it from its holster. Then, Peter Hicks fired. The pistol flew from the bandit's fingers, and, snarling, he grabbed at his shattered wrist with his left hand.

"Reach!" Peter Hicks ordered. And this time, with almost comical alacrity, Culp obeyed.

Hickory Pete sheathed one of his guns, and floundered forward. He relieved Culp of his weapons, then, with quick dexterity, spanned his sullen prisoner's wrists with handcuffs. It was not until he had assured himself that both Sabor and LeVine were harmless—and would remain so for all time—that he appeared to notice Zack Edwards.

"How's tricks, Zack?" he greeted jovially. "Didn't hurt you much, did they?"

And, as the little cowpoke did not

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answer, the sheriff went on: "Dead. Both of 'em is dead, Zack. Hated t' do it, but they was bad ones. Wanted fer murder. An' they was gunmen. Didn't dare take no chances with them. Went easy on Culp, though, becuz he warn't no gun fighter. Allus figure on takin' 'em alive—when I kin."

Edwards merely mumbled as Hicks brushed the keen edge of a knife across his bonds. Rubbing his numb wrists, he watched Hicks with round wondering eyes.

Observing this overt inspection, the sheriff grinned. "Whut's the matter" he asked. "'I'm Peter Hicks—Hickory Pete—don't you know me?"

Zack Edwards swallowed hard. "Yeah," he said, "I know thet's yore name, right enough. But—" He hesitated. "But whut I'm tryin' t' figure out, Pete, is whether yore jest a kind of lucky feller, or a sure-enough roarin' wild he-man."

Hickory Pete Hicks laughed until his fat cheeks shook. "Waal," he chuckled, "fer a fact, Zack, I've fooled better men than you, many times. Howsomever, this here business warn't nothin'. But it was all figured out, real carefullike. I came down that rope right here, figurin' they would be so sure of me that they wouldn't do no shootin'. As it turned out, I guessed 'em right. I made it look as though I was all tangled up with that rope. Fooled 'em, there, I did. When I was a young feller, I was a sailor. I landed, right side up, you remember. An' then, the shootin' kind of foxed 'em there, I did, too. I'm right handy with a six-gun, Zack, ef I do say it myself."

Zack Edwards nodded slowly. "Yeah," he said, "you did, an' you be."

A NEW LIGHT ON THE MALEMUTE

THE malemute, that good friend of man in the regions of snow and ice, is the subject of an interesting comment by a young Australian artist who has decided to devote a brush to the exclusive portrayal of dogs.

Among the high-bred dogs, the malemute is the only one who does not pose with amiability. In other words, he is not a good "sitter." He will break his pose, turn his back, and become stubborn, and often the artist has to change the easel a half dozen times at a sitting to suit his capriciousness. The reason for this is that the malemute is a one-man dog and is, therefore, inclined to ignore the rest of the world. It may be, too, that the malemute takes a serious view of life and regards having his portrait painted a trivial business. But, luckily for him, the camera man is often on the job, and not seldom during the winter season does the malemute, who has accomplished some fine work in his own line—either as a rescuer or a winner of races—fail to grace the illustrated sections of the newspapers. He knows that "it's dogged as does it."

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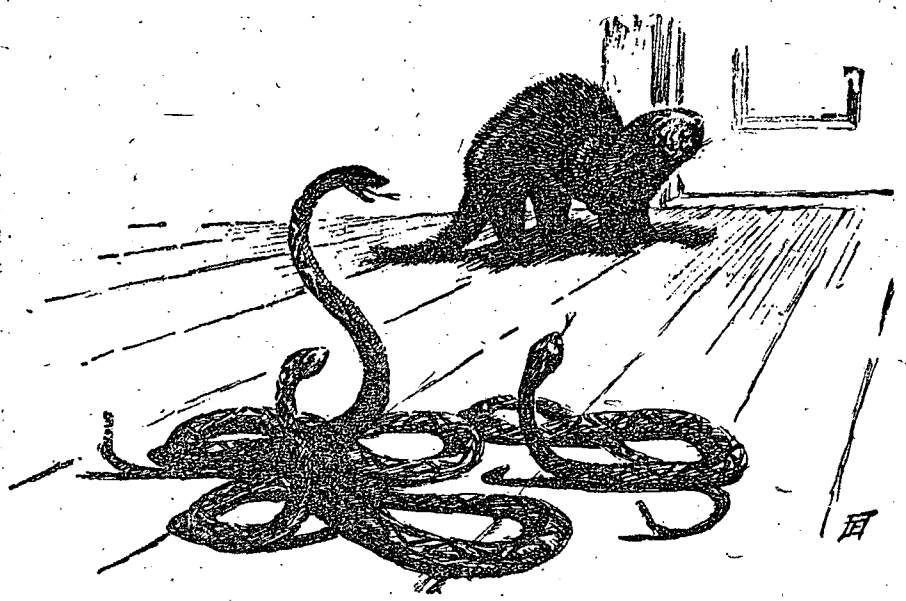

This—Great Snakes!

By Clinton Dangerfield

Author of "Kidnaped Cowboy," etc.

WHEN "Rock" Durrin, six feet of bronzed and hungry young manhood, rode in with the Lazy K mail, he found no one in the main ranch house.

Rock hung up the mail sack and hurried around toward the kitchen, hoping to rope a pie. But halfway on his toothsome quest he stopped and stared.

For he suddenly caught sight of "Pepperpot" Beasley, the cook, slinking away from the woodpile with his kindling chopper—a sharp hatchet—in his right hand, and on his face a murderous look. Rock, unobserved, slipped softly after, and when the cook cautiously closed his kitchen door behind him, Rock was peering in at an open window.

Dropping the hatchet, Pepperpot picked up a leather sack, knelt by a wire cage, set the sack over a door in it, and then by a side catch slipped back the door while he tilted the square cage. Something leaped into the bag. Instantly, the cook tied the sack mouth and reached for his hatchet.

"The darned pot-slingin' scullion!" gasped Rock to himself. "He's goin' to murder that queer critter afore I even get a chanct to see it!" And just as Pepperpot's fingers had almost reached the hatchet, Rock fired at a big frying pan hanging on the wall just above the cook's head.

It fell with a clanging crash. Pepperpot shot into the air, still clutching the bag. The cowboy dashed in, slamming the door behind him.

"Gimme that bag!" rasped Rock, his blue eyes steely.

"What the heck," snarled the cook, his big frame stiffening with anger, his red face getting redder. "Kain't I kill a few rats 'thout yuh buttin' in?"

"Rats? Yuh're jest about to 'sassi-

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nate the queer critter Colonel Rawley's brother shipped out here to eat the rats! 'N I ain't even seen it!"

"'S pity about yuh!" sneered the cook. "But nobody ain't goin' to see it! I'm tellin' the colonel it escaped. Ever sinct that dang brother of hisn starts sendin' ole Rawley a zoo, in sections, it's me—jest me—has to feed an' tend what arrives! 'Member that alligator? 'Member that dang macaw that night bit my thumb in two? They disappeared—they did! An' now this here rat-killer is gonna vanish—into a nice little grave! I'd a great deal ruther have the rats than this here ferret. Wouldn't have to clean their cages, ner wrangle 'em!"

"Wait! That ain't no ferret. That Scotch express agent on the stage tole me it was a mangoose. He called it 'mon.'"

"He was makin' a mangoose outer yuh! Ain't no rat-killers 'cept ferrets." Pepperpot snatched up his hatchet—only to find his wrist in a steely grip as Rock said eagerly:

"Gimme the ferret. I ain't never saw one. I'll take it away to——"

"Of all the crazy cow-punchers you're the worst!" howled the cook. "Jest hold a furren animile in fronter yore nose, 'n yuh'll foller! If a circus was to git into these mesas, crowbars couldn't pry yuh away from it! Git outer here, yuh locoed critter, before I kill yuh 'stidder the ferret!"

"Drop that bag!" the cowboy commanded, his eyes narrowing.

Pepperpot dropped it—that he might deliver a left-hand punch with such fury that Rock nearly took the count. The cowboy twisted Pepperpot's wrist in return. With a yell of pain, the cook dropped the hatchet also, and the two men clinched.

They wrestled and fought, savagely battling, all over the previously peaceful kitchen, while on the floor, underfoot, in bitter exasperation, the furry captive rolled and tumbled blindly around.

Chairs went over. The fighting men bumped against a shelf and a whole army of tins fell.

Clinches broke—formed again—broke—and a right to Rock's jaw sent him lurching against the table. His impact knocked off a big bowl of "sponge" which the cook had set to make "raised biscuit" for Mrs. Rawley. Such biscuit are troublesome, and were the pride of Pepperpot's heart. As the sponge quivered on the floor above its smashed container, Pepperpot howled with rage and drove too blindly at Rock. The cowboy landed a punch in Pepperpot's solar plexus, and the cook, with a grunting gasp, fell and lay quiet, his red hair resting on the sticky sponge.

Rock grabbed up the leather bag, rushed out, swung to his horse, and galloped away. His championship of the helpless furry captive more aroused than ever, he decided he would take it over to old Doc Graham and get the doctor to keep it there, letting the cook tell what tale he liked.

Perhaps Doc could tell him all about the ferret.

Rock was a born lover of animals, and had he been a wealthy man he would have had a weird zoo of his own. So he had much patience with the wrigglings and strivings of the creature in the bag, and hit the trail hard for old Doc Graham's house.

But halfway over there, he was joined by Compton Forsyth and Pete Haven, bound in the same direction.

The men exchanged greetings. Compton Forsyth drifted to the left of Rock, and Pete Haven to the right.

The three rode forward together, the two men who had just come up glancing with some curiosity at the bag which Durrin carried, and at the battle marks on his face.

Rock explained.

Pete Haven chuckled, and Compton

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Forsyth pretended to chuckle. But, in reality, Forsyth was incapable of any real laugh or smile while he was near to Rock Durrin; for under the bland expression on Forsyth's long, dark face was a poisonous hate of Rock. Colonel Rawley was openly considering either Compton Forsyth or Rock Durrin as foreman when the present incumbent, who was severely afflicted with rheumatism, should resign. This resignation was due to come in shortly.

Forsyth considered this now, as they rode along. If it were not for Rock Durrin, he thought, the promotion would assuredly be his, Forsyth's, and a venomous hate swelled Forsyth's veins until there was scarcely a cell in his active brain that did not tremble to the reaction of it.

Somehow he must get rid of this younger man, Rock Durrin, whose gay audacious courage and shrewd insight in the management of cattle bid fair to bring him promotion over one ten years his senior in experience!

This seniority, Forsyth thought, should certainly entitle him to be set over the younger man, and yet here they were, neck and neck in the race—with ominous indications that Rock Durrin might come out first! Yes, he must find some way to get rid of Durrin, and yet in his practical analysis of the thing, Forsyth told himself that if he "got shed" of his man it must be in some way that could not possibly be traced to him.

It would be a comparatively easy thing to shoot down Rock Durrin from ambush, but not so easy to be sure that no one would detect the ambusher in his hiding place.

Compton Forsyth was of the opinion that the man who believed himself hidden in the chapparal or the forest was a fool. He had known too many cases where what had been done in apparent secrecy, had turned out to be no secret at all. And then there was always the size of the bullet, and innumerable other little clews, to fasten a crime to the man who had committed it. If he got Rock Durrin out of the way, he would do it in such a manner that no one could ever connect him with it.

So while he talked lightly and steadily with his companions on the trail, the dark intricacies of Forsyth's mind mulled over this plan and that, considering, rejecting, yet never coming to any definite conclusion; although he felt that conclusion must come soon—for he hated Durrin from the top of his handsome auburn head to the arches of his small feet. The easy laughter in Durrin's blue eyes always stung Forsyth, and he boiled with bitterness over Rock's ability to sing rollicking cowboy songs and entertain a circle.

He hated the admission of the whole outfit that Rock was the best rider there, and every thread of hate and of jealousy united in bitter rage when the colonel showed any favoritism toward Rock Durrin.

At last, out of the yeasty darkness of his plotting brain, Forsyth spoke.

"Rock," he said, "I'm glad I met up with yuh, feller! I been wantin' to drop yuh a word of caution about the nester Bell—Jim Bell. Have yuh heard he's been spreadin' threats round about yuh?"

"Oh, they ain't no danger in Bell," Rock Durrin said easily.

"Don't yuh be too sure about that," said Forsyth.

"No, I wouldn't be too sure," warned Pete. "Bell's queer—and mean. Knowed to be!"

"He's a big man and a powerful one," went on Forsyth, "and he lives solitary in that cabin o' his, and that always sours a man's disposition and makes him worse. Seems he says he's got a grievance ag'in yuh, Rock. What did yuh do to him to git him in such a mean humor?"

Rock laughed again.

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"Why, yuh know," he exclaimed, "there's been a reward offered him for a certain size in rattlesnakes by that collector back East. Usually, yuh know, Bell kills 'em and squeezes out the oil, which he sells high for rheumatism, but this time he gits an offer for these big rattlers alive, but they gotta be regular giants. Well, now, Bell was in pursuit of the very biggest one, the great grandaddy of all rattlers that ever happened in these parts. He was after the snake with a cleft stick, aimin' to cinch him good and proper, an' git him into the sack, an' here I come gallopin' along. Never seein' Jim Bell a-crawlin' through the chapparal right behind the snake, an' me hatin' all reptiles like pizen, why, o' course, I shot the dang snake's head off! Then Jim Bell he come bustin' out of the chapparal, and yuh never heard anythin' equal to the cussin' he done! He swore he'd git even with me, if he lived a hundred years to do it, but they ain't no real danger in him."

"Well, now, I don't know about that," said Pete Haven, riding on Rock Durrin's right. "Jim Bell's father used to be friendly with a tribe of Apaches, and I've heard Bell, many a time, tell his father's tales about how he once helped the Apaches stake out a man he hated. I think Bell's a mean bozo; yuh want to watch out for him, Rock! He loved those danged doin's of his dad just a little too well! Now here's where I'm goin' to leave yuh both, and when yuh and Forsyth pass Bell's cabin, yuh better look out, Rock, that he don't plunk a bullet into yuh from ambush!"

But Durrin only laughed.

Pete Haven galloped away, cutting down a side trail, and the two rivals for the foremanship pursued their way together, rapidly approaching the nester's cabin. Compton Forsyth was thinking swiftly. Bell was away, and Forsyth knew it. But this knowledge was a piece of private information which only he possessed. Bell had borrowed five dollars from Forsyth, and had asked him to keep it a secret that he, Bell, would be away a couple of days.

Forsyth said to himself that he could take the material Fate had thrown into his hands and weld out of it a weapon by which he could destroy Durrin in a manner so characteristic of what Bell would be likely to do that there would be no possible chance of any trouble falling on him!

In the welding of this weapon, Forsyth took account even of the weather, for he knew by the rapidly piling up clouds in the west that there would be a heavy shower before long.

As they neared the cabin, he began to talk pleasantly to Durrin about Colonel Rawley's youngest child, Lucy, a small girl of seven. She was as devoted to Rock Durrin as Rock was to her.

"That young un sure loves yuh, Rock," observed Compton Forsyth with flattering suavity. "I watched her the other day, a-settin' in yore lap, and yuh and her studyin' in the same picture book together. I don't believe she ever gets a new picture book without comin' to yuh."

As he spoke, he imperceptibly edged his horse in a little closer, but slowly, so that inch by inch, the other's horse was forging ahead.

"I love the kid," Rock said simply, "an' it's like yuh say. I don't believe she ever gits a new picture book from them Eastern kin o' hers without she wants me to see the pictures, and read 'em over for her. Only yesterday her and me——"

Forsyth's horse had now fallen back just the requisite space to leave Compton slightly behind Durrin.

Forsyth's right hand was in his coat pocket, and in that pocket he had slipped his fingers into a set of brass knuckles welded into one line, not separate. This made a terrible, and perhaps man-killing, weapon, but, a silent one. They had almost reached Bell's cabin now, but

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Durrin merely gave it a careless glance and continued happily:

"Lucy's last picture book is one about India and Asia——"

He never finished the sentence. Compton Forsyth's right hand, loaded with its brass knuckles, shot out.

It took the unsuspecting cowboy behind his left ear. Rock Durrin pitched from the saddle as though he had been struck by lightning.

His startled horse stopped, and it was well that it did so, for the right boot of the rider was still in the stirrup.

Compton Forsyth dismounted, trailed his own reins, glanced at the now swiftly massing clouds, fancied he felt a drop of rain on his hand, walked around to Rock Durrin's side, disentangled his foot from the stirrup and coolly carried him into the nester's cabin.

Forsyth knew before he entered it, from something which Jim Bell had said, that all that he needed was there in the cabin.

Forsyth now laid the senseless cowboy carefully on the floor, went to Bell's tool chest and got a hammer and some heavy staples. These he drove into the floor, and then, with heavy cord he had also brought from the chest, he "staked out" the cowboy as adroitly and as carefully as any Apache in the old Indian days could have done.

Now Forsyth went outside to the leather bag containing the "ferret." The bag was tumbling over and over with its occupant's angry rapidity. The animal inside had begun cutting the leather, and now a head illumined with bright, fearless eyes looked out.

Forsyth had brought with him the wooden poker which Jim Bell used in his fireplace, and he now did to the unlucky animal what the cook had purposed to do—struck him over the head. When the agile body, after one convulsive quiver, lay inert, Forsyth picked up the leather sack and carried it into the cabin.

There, stirred with curiosity, he cut the string of the bag, pulled the animal out, and looked at it with considerable interest. It was larger and heavier than he had supposed a ferret to be, very thickly coated with rufous gray hair over the long body and full tail.

Then he recalled sharply that it was dangerous to linger here any longer, and he threw the animal across the unconsicous cowboy's body.

"Lie there!" he said, "yore rescuer'll soon be as dead as yuh are!"

His preliminary preparations for staging a murder which in every detail seemed to fit into the characteristic complexes of Jim Bell, being now completed, Forsyth went over to a wire cage and with considerable caution unfastened the door, the base of which rested on the floor.

As soon as the door swung back, Forsyth hurried to the outside door of the cabin and stood there, watching to see what the three big reptiles in the cage would do.

The rattlesnakes did not discover at once that the door was open, but in about a minute Forsyth saw a huge, mottled body glide forward. An enormous, inquiring head was thrust forward, and the first of the great trio began to pass out of the cage.

Satisfied now that all would go well with his own dark plans, Forsyth hurried out, closing the door behind him and adjusting the outside latch carefully.

He took Durrin's horse around to the nester's little stable and put it into a stall —it must not be left outside to attract attention—then he went back to his own horse, just as the storm burst in fury, a regular squall of wind and rain that in a short time would eradicate the marks of the horses' hoofs.

Forsyth smiled cynically. Everything was playing into his hands. He sprang into the saddle and rode away in great haste.

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Rock Durrin came back to consciousness through a mist of whirling sensation, through a throbbing agony which made him feel that he was struggling out of some nightmare which could not be real; but as he strove to rise out of the nightmare, he began to realize, against his will, that each hand, each foot, was held down to the floor by cruelly tight cords. His own reason now shocked him into accepting that fact that, in some mysterious manner, he who had last been on horseback in the open sunshine was lying there, staked out, a prisoner, on the floor of Jim Bell's hut!

Was this Bell's work? And if so, how had he managed it?

The cowboy thought painfully back to the minute he last remembered in the saddle, and suddenly it flashed upon him that Forsyth had dropped a little behind him.

Sending his thoughts still further back, he recalled how Forsyth had been leading him on to talk about the child, getting him absorbed in the remembrance of little Lucy and her picture book.

Durrin groaned.

"The yellow cur!" he said to himself. "He got a little behind me without me ever noticin' it! Then he struck. But he never could have hit me that hard with his bare fists, I bet he had knuckles on! I must ha' gone down like a poled ox. It wasn't Jim Bell that was back of all this; it was jest nuthin' an' no one but Forsyth! And why?"

Again his mind struggled, and presently he muttered to himself, through teeth clenched on pulsating pain, the word "Foreman!" Yes, that was the key to it! Forsyth knew that he, Rock Durrin, was going to get that promotion! Then came that talk about Apaches and Jim Bell. He had been staked out here with the idea of giving Jim Bell the blame of it. But, after all, merely lying here on the floor, though agonizing with a splitting headache, wouldn't kill a man.

He raised his head, the one free part of his body, and looked around to see what other danger might be threatening him.

His gaze met the cold, reptilian stare of the largest rattlesnake and from the cowboy's lips came a gasp of horror. So that was it!

In that talk about Jim Bell's Apache stories, Forsyth had pounced like a panther on the scheme the conversation secretly suggested to him—a scheme that would appear a murderous revenge by Bell through the reptiles which he alone handled. Death by snakes for shooting the prize snake!

"Why, the old Nick hisself couldn't have worked no cleverer," gasped Rock. "An' he'll get away with it! An' I'll die here, by inches, for he must know Bell's away."

The cowboy's anguished gaze circled the room and now he saw that there was not one snake but three. Their breed he knew at a glance; he was in the room with three czars of the American reptilian world—rattlesnakes! And sooner or later they would get him.

His head sank back and a groan forced its way through his clenched teeth. Cold drops sprang to his forehead and despair clutched at his heart with leaden fingers.

He wanted to shout for help, but his reason told him how futile such an act was and suggested also that it might anger the snakes.

In his immediate terror, he had almost forgotten his pain, and now he became conscious of a weight across his belt. Again he raised his head and looking down saw, lying on his own body, the body of the ferret.

So Forsyth had killed it! Well, the ferret was fortunate. A swift end. No pain. While he himself—what might he not have to bear before death released him?

His gaze returned to the great reptiles.

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He tried to believe that they would ignore him, but reason told him that in these narrow confines one—yes, and more than one—would crawl over his body, his face—and if he moved, coughed, or sneezed—if he even breathed—Heaven! How could he expect to escape them?

He had always had a horror of snakes. Now as their musty odor filled the room and they crawled angrily to and fro, seeking a means of exit, he said to himself that one of them at least would be at him inside of five minutes.

He felt his hair stir at the roots. Along his spine a wave of terror and revulsion came that almost nauseated him. He dared not even struggle at his bonds for fear of attracting the attention of those deadly, coldly staring creatures, which in their curiously blind way were moving swiftly around the cabin, tapping against the wall, seeking persistently here and there for exits.

The little windows were too high for them to reach, else they would have been up on them, tapping at the panes, beating their reptilian heads against the glass. He wished to Heaven that they could have got up on the window sill; it might have kept them there, hopeful of exit and unable to understand why the glass barred them out.

They might have escaped by the fireplace, but the wire screen defeated them there.

There was something sinisterly beautiful in their coils, in their undulant way of moving, and a real magnificence in their rich colors; but the desperate and terror-stricken cowboy could see none of this. To him, they were merely living nightmares, living perils, monsters, whose daggerlike fangs would finish him inside of a very limited time. He tried to turn away his thoughts by looking again at the ferret. He almost fancied that form was still warm, but the bright, audacious eyes were closed, and the upper lip snarled up in a spasmodic revelation of the white teeth within. Rock said to himself that in being dead the ferret was fortunate. Whatever pain it had suffered was all over now. Then he caught a ripple of motion against his body and a violent start ran through him. A snake was against him already! No, by Heaven, it was the ferret stirring! It had been stunned and not killed, and for this he pitied it. What could a ferret do against rattlesnakes?

The animal lifted its head presently and shook it in a funny little way, almost as a man might shake his head in trying to clear his brain of some obscuring fog, and its bright eyes looked with a piercing and challenging gaze into the eyes of the desperate man underneath.

As that strange, seeking gaze plunged fearlessly down into his, the cowboy knew he had seen this keen animal face before. Again Rock was in the sun with the little picture-book girl. Spread on his knees was her open book. A vivid scene was pictured in colors on one page interpreted by a rhyme. The words flashed through his retentive memory:

> This picture is a sure-enough thriller,
> For here's the famous Cobra-killer,
> The Mongoose! Like an olden Knight.
> He finds in battle deep delight!

Then the words of the Scotch agent recurred to him. "Mangoose." So Rock Durrin had translated, supposing the "mon" the usual dialect Scotch for man. But the agent had spoken correctly—mongoose.

The brightly colored picture hung in Rock's mind—a mongoose, just the replica of this one, advancing on a huge cobra which, with its sinister hood spread with rage, was gliding down on the mongoose.

But that mongoose had only one snake to contend with, while this alien would have three reptilian kings, giants of their kind, and noted for courage. Rock dared not hope.

The mongoose rose on its short legs

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and stood there on the cowboy, its long, full tail curling over Rock's hips. In the cobra-killer's face, under its small, rounded ears, the jeweled eyes flashed with a vindictive intelligence. The lust of battle was in them, and perhaps a memory of that blow on its head for which it was seeking cause. The cowboy waited in an agony of anxiety to see what effect its first sight of the snakes would have. That effect was beyond his expectations; a sudden blaze of cold fury flashed into the animal's eyes, scintillated, gleamed, and sparkled there. The nostrils in the short nose quivered. The lips twitched, and the hair on the long body began to rise.

To his mingled rage and delight, the mongoose saw before him the ancient enemies of his whole race—reptiles!

How often had his grandfather, and his grandfather's grandfather, fought with the hooded cobra and slain it! Once in a while his ancestors had themselves been slain by the cobra, for, contrary to the usual popular belief, the mongoose survives not by sheer exemption to the poison of the snake but because of its own extraordinary swiftness.

Yet what chance, thought the desperate cowboy, had even a mongoose to survive against three enemies, three huge rattlers, picked out for their great size? That size, of course, meaning not only longer reach in striking, but more venom in the poison sacs connecting with the long, white fangs.

But Rock did not credit the knightly killer with the keen militant intelligence it possessed. The mongoose did not attack all three of its enemies at once. It bided its time, waiting with every sign of swelling rage until the three great snakes, who were roving around within close distance of each other, had separated.

When one snake had crawled sullenly into a corner, when another was examining with futile interest and stupid beatings of its head, the wire screen in front of the fireplace, seeking some hole big enough there to get through, and feeling the current of air that was sucking upward, then the mongoose turned at once upon the middle-sized snake, itself a giant, which the others had left near the center of the room. This snake was bearing straight for the body of the cowboy—when the mongoose shot between the rattler and the terror-stiffened, helpless man.

The mongoose's whole body seemed to nearly double in size, for its flesh swelled with rage, and every hair rose. Its eyes sparkled and gleamed with fury.

It rushed forward with what seemed to Rock a crazy disregard of consequences. Instantly the big reptile struck furiously—and missed! The mongoose had sprung aside.

Again the mongoose, bristling with hate, apparently offered himself as an easy target. Again, with amazing swiftness, he flashed aside as the white fangs struck. Rage and cold self-possession were strangely mingled in the mongoose.

The angered reptile attacked again. Over and over the mongoose repeated its tactics, unwearied, its eyes glowing with battle lust.

At last the rattlesnake took alarm. It turned quite suddenly and began to glide away.

The mongoose leaped after it; seized it by the throat, close under the jaws, bit deeper—deeper—while snake and killer rolled over together, the richly colored coils of the rattler closing vainly around the mongoose in a dying effort. Rock, his head turned toward them, saw in horror the dying rattler's mate rushing now to its rescue!

The cowboy shouted, as he might have done to some gallant human being—and in a flash the mongoose had cast aside the gnawed head, had freed himself from the coils, was fighting the second monster—probably because its own piercing vision had caught its enemy's coming in a backward glance.

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Again the mongoose taunted his antagonist. Over and over the snake was fooled and mocked by what seemed a sure chance to kill the famous killer. Always with the same intelligent animosity, the same cool courage, the mongoose wearied and finally dazed his perplexed foe. Too confused to fight, the snake attempted to join its fellow at the hearth. Fatal error! The mongoose flashed after it, the steel jaws of the furry killer closed! The great serpent rolled, thrashed, then lay dying, to the ghastly music of the third snake's rattles, sounding malignantly from the hearth. But for those insolent rattles it might have lived; that angry challenge was its death —it went the way of the other two!

The cowboy's heart beat high with hope.

"Feller," he gasped, in a shaken voice, addressing his four-footed companion, "if ever I get out o' this alive, I'll see yuh live in comfort the rest o' yore life!"

The mongoose noticed his voice and cast him a careless glance. Its hair was sleeking down again now; its body soon looked of normal size; the spectacular change was over, that change in which the flesh of the mongoose seems actually to swell.

With an air of supercilious disdain, the mongoose strode around the room, casting occasional glances at his dead enemies. He seemed to be figuring in his mind whether he would make a supper of one or not; undoubtedly, he was hungry. Then he discovered a small basket of cherished eggs which Jim Bell was reserving for his own breakfast.

This basket the mongoose promptly plundered, breaking into the white shells and sucking up the contents, making weird little sounds of pleasure.

The watching cowboy called, "Go it, old feller, eat every egg in the basket! Yuh sure have deserved it."

Then all pleasantry faded from Rock's voice. Outside he heard the drumming of hoofs, and with a start of terror begotten by his helplessness he asked himself who could be coming now? Who but Compton Forsyth, to gloat over a man swollen and good as dead from the poison of the great reptiles?

Closer—closer came the rapid approach of a horse's hoofs. Sickening fear crept over the helpless man on the floor. Had Forsyth determined to put his helpless rival to death by swifter methods than at first employed? Or had he feared that, by some miracle of interposition, the snakes would never touch the man but remain in their own corner?

Rock Durrin caught every vibration as the galloping horse came up and slid to a stop. Then he heard the rider spring to the ground, and heard the stride of booted feet coming rapidly toward the cabin. Now those boots were clumping up the steps—there seemed something a little irregular in the walk. Had Forsyth filled himself up on redeye and come staggering back to do some other Apachelike thing?

Rock Durrin braced himself to meet the worst.

He heard the door slowly but resolutely opened—a figure lurched in, closed it, and gazed around.

Over in the far corner the mongoose paused among his eggshells, wheeled round, and fastened his bright, inquiring eyes on the intruder.

That intruder looked at the spread-eagled man on the floor, at the dead snakes, at the mongoose, and then ejaculated:

"Well, heck and high water! I ain't never seen nuthin' like this, Rock."

"Cookie," said the cowboy, "in all my life I ain't never seen a sight as handsome or good appearin' as yuh!"

"Handsome, am I? Well, I didn't leave in no handsome mood. I been ridin' like wildfire on yore tracks till I teched that belt of rain-washed ground. But the cabin was in sight, 'n' I figured

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yuh might be gettin' Bell to hide the ferret. Now I dunno whatta think."

"Cut me loose an' I'll tell yuh the whole of this, but keep yore gun handy. It's Forsyth's work, and he's liable to be back here any time. He knocked me out and drug me in here, and when I come to I was like this!"

All animosity now left the cook; he saw the cruel tightness of the ties which bound the cowboy down, realized what the man must have suffered; and set about cutting him loose. As he did so he heard the tale of the killer and the killed, and at the end he whistled.

"Well," he said, "mongoose, is he? Cobra-killer! I've heerd of cobras, but I hadn't ever heerd of the mongoose. Live and learn. And now, I reckon," he added, as he helped the other to sit up and began to chafe his arms, "yuh ain't any notion ever to see any harm come to that there mongoose."

"Cookie," said the cowboy earnestly, "yuh've always coveted that carved leather saddle o' mine. It's yorn—an' my best gun—if only yuh'll promise yuh'll never hurt hair nor head of that mongoose."

Cook's eyes glistened.

"Well, I promise," he said. "Betwixt the two of us we'll get him back, and he can live forever after happy at the colonel's."

When Rock's circulation was restored, the cook drawled innocently: "Reckon we better hit the trail fer the corrals as soon as possible." But he expected the answer he got.

Rock Durrin's eyes narrowed; he said in a cold and quiet voice:

"I'm goin' snake huntin' now, cookie. After a two-legged reptile. We'll ketch the mongoose and yuh take it home. If yuh rumple so much as one of his hairs, yuh don't git that carved saddle, but me—it's like I said, I'm goin' snake huntin'."

The cook looked a trifle nervous.

"See here," he said, "yuh ain't sech a bad feller, Rock. Supposin' we shut the mongoose up in that there wire cage, and yuh lemme ride along with yuh, an' I'll be a witness to how I found yuh here, if it comes to a show-down between yuh and that there snake yuh speak of. I'll be a livin' witness as to why yuh settled accounts with him—if so be yuh git a chance to settle."

"Yuh're a good feller yoreself," said the cowboy, pleased. "I reckon we'll do jest that. Stand still an' I'll ketch my killer friend."

"And git yore fingers bit," grinned the cook, adding, "I wouldn't tech that thing for a farm!"

But Rock Durrin had a way with all animals, and the mongoose had been a pet in the foreign home which he had left so far away. He liked the quiet and gentle approach of the cowboy and suffered himself to be picked up and put into the wire cage without objection. Then the two men left the hut, fastening the door carefully behind them.

In the Double Delight Saloon, Compton Forsyth stood drinking to his own cleverness—secretly, of course. It was the third glass of raw whisky which he had downed, for he could hold his liquor well and his nerves were only the steadier for it.

Never had the barkeeper seen Forsyth quite so amiable or so friendly; indeed, he seemed to exude good humor toward the whole world, and he spoke in the most pleasant manner of his rival, Rock Durrin.

"There's a nice young feller for yuh, one that deserves to git on."

The barkeeper was a little puzzled by this unusual suavity on Forsyth's part. He had dealt so much with humanity that that sixth sense which tells a man when bland words are being used to mask very different thoughts was always with him. He said to himself that Forsyth had been up to some kind of mischief, but that the fellow was so clever

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that nobody would ever know what it was.

It was night; the place was lighted by two great kerosene lamps kept neatly filled and polished, and the room was a blaze of light. Half a dozen small and well-dusted tables with their accompanying chairs offered an inviting field to poker players, and nearly a dozen cowboys, a mixed group from several of the surrounding ranches, were gambling at these tables in a good-humored way, most of them drinking. In the former group was Pete Haven.

A general spirit of jollity seemed to reign over the room, but these were armed men, in a country where gun law was the only way of keeping things straight at all, and there was not a single man there however clear his conscience might be, who was not on the lookout at all times for any tensity in the atmosphere, any vague threat of danger. So it was not surprising that a large percentage of these men instantly perceived it when the form of Compton Forsyth stiffened.

They were aware that he was staring into the mirror which hung back of the bar—that he saw there a vision which arrested the glass of whisky he was raising to his lips and so affected his fingers that they dropped the small glass. It crashed on the bar, giving out a faint, warning tinkle, while the reek of the spilled whisky rose in the air as if it were incense to some strange Nemesis treading, wool-footed, on Forsyth's heels.

Forsyth whirled, his hand held tensely poised above his gun.

In the doorway at which he stared stood the man whom he had left to the sinister daggers of the rattlesnakes, and his hand also hovered above his gun.

Rock Durrin laughed, and this time there was nothing easy in his laughter. It had in it the sound of clashing steel, and one look at Rock Durrin's face, one sound of that laughter in their ears, sent half the cowboys scrambling for safer parts in the room. More than one went under the tables.

A few remained where they were, and coolly watched.

They had not to watch long. Rock Durrin spoke, and his voice was hoarse with the rage that consumed him.

"Go for it!" he snapped to Forsyth, and as he spoke the right hand of Forsyth plunged for his gun.

Both men were amazingly quick on the draw, but the gun of Rock Durrin slipped from its holster a split second quicker than that of the man who had staked him out.

The two guns spoke so close together that it was hard for the spectators to realize who had fired first. But there were only two shots, one from each man, and when the smoke had been cleared away, Forsyth, killed in fair battle, lay on the floor with a hole between his eyebrows. Rock was untouched.

It was the barkeeper who spoke first, after those in the room had surged forward and were standing looking down on the dead man. The barkeeper said:

"Rock, I've knowed yuh for some years; yuh ain't the kind of man, even in a fair fight like this, to kill without danged good reasons. If yuh're in the notion to do it, tell us why yuh done this."

"I'll leave it to him to tell yuh, seein' that but for him I'd ha' been dead," Rock said, jerking an indicatory thumb toward the cook, who now strode into the room with an air of great importance.

And from the cook the assembled men heard the story which was really not so much the story of Rock Durrin as of that animal which became famous in that whole section of the country for its knightly battle—the cobra-killer.

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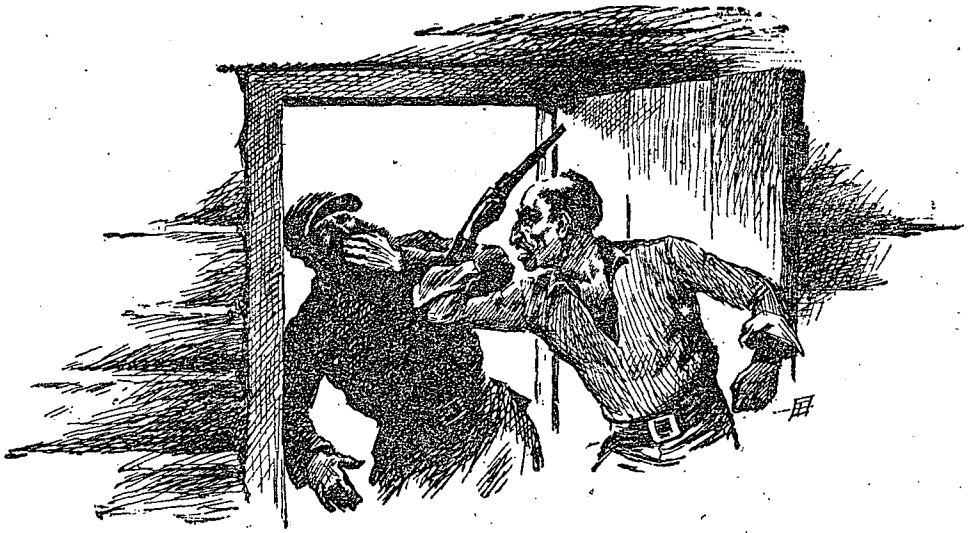

Trail of the Buzzard

By Robert J. Horton

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

A SOFT Mexican voice tells Sheriff John Mack over the telephone that the speaker, "The Buzzard," is going to rob the bank at Pinola—and cuts the wire. The Buzzard fulfills his threat, and kills the banker. Determined to capture the elusive and insolent outlaw, Mack plans to enlist the services of another desperado, Alex Lamont, with whom he has a truce. Lamont is found in a cabin at Seymore, bandit headquarters, with a beautiful Creole. The conference is disturbed by a dishevelled Mexican named José, who says he has killed a man in self-defense and now seeks food. He displays skill as a knife thrower, narrowly missing Lamont, and leaves. Thompson, proprietor of the Combination, is ordered to look out for José. Lamont and Mack visit a Mexican dive. José appears, and insults Lamont, who orders him to draw. The lights are shot out and José suggests tha they adjourn to the cabin where Lamont is a guest. The Mexican there announces that the beautiful Dolores and Señora Guerra are his cousin and aunt.

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTURED!

BOTH Lamont and John Mack were stunned by this suave announcement. Lamont looked at Señora Guerra, and she nodded. Then Lamont became a raging volcano of wrath. "Jack," he called. "Jack!"

When the girl entered, he strode toward her. "Is that your cousin?" he demanded, pointing his scrawny finger at José.

"Yes," replied the girl, her eyes widening in fright at the stern look he gave her.

"Then why didn't you say so?" he demanded in white-hot anger. "Why should I be made a fool of in this house? Tell me that!"

"But—señor——" It was the girl's mother who spoke.

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"An' you, too," said Lamont savagely. "What kind of a game is this?"

"I have no control over him," said the woman with some dignity.

"The señor—he forget his manners," said José politely.

Lamont whirled on him. "You sneaking——" He paused. "For the sake of your aunt an' cousin I won't call you what you are. Don't move your right hand or I'll drop you in your tracks!"

The eyes of José were like a snake's, the lower lip was drawn back against the white teeth. If it had not been for Lamont's timely warning and his display of genuine rage, the Mexican undoubtedly would have gone for his knife. But John Mack's gun was in his hand to guard against such a move. For the second time Mack was seeing the real Lamont—the Lamont of the lightning draw; the Lamont whom he had cornered, and who at that time laughed scornfully in the face of death, ready and willing to die with his gun blazing.

"You said you were going to talk," Lamont hurled at José. "Are you going to talk or do a lot more lying? You're like all the rest of the spicks——"

There was a flicker of the Mexican's narrowed lids.

Lamont leaped to the farther side of the room. "Now! Go for it! I won't start my draw until you move your hand! Go for your knife, you black-skinned coward! Go for it!"

But the girl ran to him and threw her arms about his neck. "José!" she cried. "Alex! You must not fight, for I love you both. Please—please Alex. You are so angry. Do your little Jack the favor and don't fight."

She pressed her warm red lips upon his as Señora Guerra hurried out of the room.

It was John Mack who now took command of the situation. "The girl is right," he said. "You two will gain nothing by fighting." He faced José. "Why did you make that play early in the night when it was not necessary? All you had to do was to say you were a relative of these people and had a right to be here. What was the idea in all the dramatics—and why did you lie?"

"Be careful of that word," purred José. "I do not like that word, meestaire. Who are you?" The last three words cut through the room like the clash of sword blades.

"I am a friend of Lamont's," replied Mack. "I have a right to ask, for I was talking with him when you were listening at the window."

"Maybe so, maybe so," said the Mexican; "an' you ask me in the nice way, so I answer." He bowed slightly, with a thin smile on his lips. "I come to see my relatives. I see two men inside here. I say, 'What they do here?' I go round to look in an' see. Then I hear the talk. I ver' interest in the talk. Then Señor Lamont, he jump through the window, an' I let the señor get me. For I just like the excitement. Then I no see why I should say who I am till I see an' hear some more. So I make the play acting. My cousin, she help me, for so I say with the nod. My cousin, she like me ver' much."

He looked at Lamont and again his white teeth were disclosed in a grin. Lamont ground his teeth, and the girl's arms tightened about his neck.

Then José again turned his attention to the sheriff. The smile was gone. The eyes again were the eyes of a snake, darting greenish fire, dancing, glittering. "So, meestair"—he prolonged his pronunciation of the words—"you want heem they call The Buzzard?"

Lamont threw the girl aside and stepped forward.

"You know him?" he demanded.

"An' if I do, señor, I know a ver' bad man," was the suave reply. "Ver' much more bad man than you." José sneered. "So much more bad man than you that he make you look like the sheep-herder,

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señor. You kill one of my people tonight. I hear them say in town it take two Mexican to make one gringo. But with The Buzzard, you call heem, it take ten, maybe twenty, fifty, hundred gringos to make one of heem!"

José stepped back, his chin lifted, his eyes glowing.

Again John Mack felt the overflowing conviction that here was one who knew far more of the outlaw than he would even hint. For the man's words were not bravado, nor did they merely signify pride in one of his race, they indicated in a subtle way personal knowledge of and acquaintance with the notorious killer.

"Did he tell you to tell me that?" asked Lamont in a queer tone.

José lifted his brows. "He tell me nothing," he said stiffly. "I speak for mysel' an' my people. I do not like you, Señor Lamont."

"I suspected as much," said Lamont dryly. "What are you going to do about it?"

José shrugged. "I am at the—ah—disadvantage, you say?" Then he turned his back abruptly on the other and went through the door leading into the kitchen.

"Now it is all over, Alex," said the girl, putting a hand on Lamont's arm and looking at him pleadingly. Mack saw plainly that she was in love with him.

He shook off the hand. "All over?" he said. "Yes. So far as you an' I are concerned, it's all over. I was a fool to listen to you in the first place. I make no more promises to women. You helped that smart cousin of yours to make fun of Lamont, eh? Just because he gave you a nod or two, eh? You were only kidding yourself an' didn't know it!"

With that he strode across the room, opened a door and disappeared.

The girl stood trembling, her hands crossed over her breast, tears in her big dark eyes. José entered and she flung herself upon him like a little tiger. "Get out!" she sobbed. "Go away. You don't belong here. You should not have come between me and my man. I hate you. Get out" She slapped him but he merely laughed a mean laugh and flung her from him.

"You are the little fool!" he said scornfully. "Do you think I'd let you have a man like that? You do not know so much as me." Then followed a tirade in Spanish.

And the girl's eyes were no longer filled with tears. They were flashing angrily and scornfully, and the hot Spanish words came in a stream, until José turned away with a shrug and went out. She turned to John Mack.

"You are going away?" she asked.

"I am not sure," the sheriff evaded. For that matter he was not sure.

"But you are!" the girl insisted. "I can tell by the way Señor Lamont acts. He is very angry and when he is that way he—I am not sure of him. I would like to be sure of him, Señor Mack. I love him."

It was said in such simple earnest that the sheriff was taken aback. He did not know what to say. He opened his mouth and shut it as he looked into the large, pleading eyes of the girl. "By the soul of me, she is beautiful!" he said to himself.

"You will bring him back to me, Señor Mack?"

"I reckon he'll come back himself," said John Mack. "He'll be a fool if he doesn't."

"But all the pretty women, they like Señor Alex," she said. "I thought I could hold him. But now, José——" She stamped her dainty foot and again her dark eyes flashed. "He is the fool, not I. Some day he will act too well and then he will never act again!"

At this juncture Lamont came in. The girl gave a little cry as she saw the change in his attire. His hat and boots

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were worn. The flannel shirt and trousers had seen much service. And buckled about his waist was a double cartridge belt, crossed, with a gun hanging low on each thigh, strapped close. He was in riding and fighting trim.

"C'mon, Mack, we'll go."

The girl flung herself upon him, kissing him, sobbing; but he paid no heed. "Good-by, Dolores," he said simply. Mack had gone for the horses at first sight of him.

"Call me Jack, like you always do," she pleaded. "Alex, are you coming back?"

"Probably not," he replied shortly. "I've been going stale here. Anyway, there's trouble in sight, if I know anything about signs. That cousin of yours didn't come up here for nothing."

"He is a fool" exclaimed the girl vehemently. "I hate him, and I told him so. I told him to get out. You'll come back again, won't you, Alex? Please come back to Jack." They were on the porch and her arms crept about his neck, her lips were against his cheek. "Kiss me, Alex." He kissed her and then, disengaging her embrace, leaped lightly off the end of the porch and mounted the horse Mack had brought.

The first silver streamers of dawn were bathing the eastern ridge, and a golden veil shone through the gap which marked the canyon trail. They rode silently down the valley. John Mack was troubled, undecided. Where was Lamont going, and what was he going to do? He had seen the old adventurous light come back into the man's eyes in the living room of the cabin when he had gone for his trail clothes. Was he going back to the old game? Or had the taunting of José determined him to start after The Buzzard? Mack did not care to ask. But something was in the wind—something dangerous and important. Alex Lamont did not start out on trivial expeditions.

"Mack, the best thing you can do is light out for home," said Lamont, as they neared the town. "You needn't ask me any questions, because I'm not going to answer them. Just get your breakfast an' slope. You can take it from me that you're through up here."

"Just as you say," said Mack, not knowing whether he had succeeded in his mission or not. "I'll get a snack in the Combination an' move out."

There was no further talk. They dismounted in front of the Combination, tied their horses and went in to eat. "Will you be riding along with me part way?" asked Mack.

"No," was the sharp rejoinder. "My work starts here."

Meanwhile, José had not been idle. He had saddled and ridden down the valley on the opposite bank of the stream, screened from the main trail by trees and willows. In the Mexican quarter he had visited a cabin and shortly afterward a rider had sped down the valley to the canyon trail. Next he had visited another cabin and remained some five minutes. Now, as John Mack came out of the resort where he had breakfasted, José was leaning on the hitching rack.

As Mack prepared to mount, the Mexican spoke. "You are going without your friend?" he asked pleasantly.

"Perhaps," snapped the sheriff.

"It will be hot in the desert, señor," José observed.

"Most likely," Mack agreed, as he swung into the saddle.

As he rode away, the Mexican's eyes narrowed and the snaky, shifting glitter returned. He swore softly in Spanish. Then he entered the Combination.

Sheriff John Mack proceeded down the valley at a canter. It was broad day and already the sun was shining in the gap in the east range where he would take the canyon trail for the desert. He did not pay so much attention

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to the scenery this morning, nor did he particularly remark the crisp coolness of the air, although he knew that the burning inferno of the desert lay ahead. His thoughts were concerned with the sudden change in Lamont, a change brought about by the disclosure of José that he was a relative of the girl and her mother, and his remarks about The Buzzard. The fires of hope burned in the sheriff's breast; for he wanted the infamous outlaw as he never had wanted a lawbreaker before. Well, he had carried out his plan. He had found Lamont and had made his proposition. He believed his cause had been furthered by José. Now there was nothing to do but follow Lamont's instructions—return to Bayneville and await developments.

Directly he reached the canyon trail and rode down between the towering rock walls. Again he was conscious of being watched; but this time he was fully aware of the lookout above. He walked his horse down the steep, winding trail. He had not slept the previous night, but he congratulated himself on the fact that though he was sixty years old, he still could miss a night's sleep and not feel tired—not too tired. And he did not have so many miles to go to the first stop, where he could obtain food and water and rest.

Soon, on the more open turns, he could glimpse the shimmering desert far below. In the foothills he would dismount for a short rest before riding out under the merciless sun. Such were his thoughts. The premonition of danger had no place among them. The danger lay behind; up in the mountain rendezvous of the lawless. He thought of the girl Dolores, whom Lamont had called Jack. He thought of her pouting, red lips, of the grief swimming in her eyes. Lamont was pretty much of a brute. Well, all his kind were. What else could she expect? But love was blind. Yes, that was it—love was——

What was that? A thin shadow seemed to dart over his head. He dodged instinctively, and his horse lunged as the rope fell across its flanks. Mack drove in his spurs, jerked out his gun, and twisted in the saddle to look behind.

The canyon walls had widened here and below the cliffs were trees. From these trees burst several riders, spurring their mounts madly. John Mack fired twice. The answering reports echoed in the canyon and a bullet tore through his hat. He leaned far forward in the saddle, fired again, and then realized it was no use. The riders were almost upon him.

A huge bearded man, brandishing a six-shooter, shouted to him. "Drop that gun! Drop it, or we'll drop you!"

There was not a chance. John Mack immediately dropped his gun and reined in his horse.

The riders surrounded him. There were six of them—four Mexicans and two white men. It was on the white men that John Mack concentrated his attention. His eyes shone with contempt.

"You're a pair to be proud of," he said scornfully.

For answer, one of them closed in with his horse and struck him in the face with the barrel of his gun.

"That'll learn you to keep your tongue behind your teeth," he said viciously.

The blood spurted from John Mack's lips, but his eyes shot fire. "You might as well crack me for keeps," he said contemptuously, "for I'm going to tell you only a coward would do that."

The man made as if to strike again, but John Mack straightened in the saddle. "You better leave that for your boss to do," he said sternly.

The man did not strike. "You know a lot," he sneered. "Well, you're goin' to know a lot more—an' then you ain't goin' to know anything."

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"An' then maybe I'll see you hung," returned John Mack.

"Truss him in that saddle," roared his assailant. "We can't hang aroun' here all day."

Two of the men dismounted and tied the sheriff's feet and ankles from stirrup to stirrup, drawing them tightly under the horse.

"Never mind his hands an' arms," instructed the leader. "He won't go far like that even if his horse bolts. The nag don't look as if it could outrun bullets. Bring his gun. Two of you go ahead there. His horse'll follow. We ain't got all day."

The cavalcade started on down the trail with John Mack a prisoner. There were no doubts in his mind as to whose prisoner he was. John Mack knew too well.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BUZZARD.

IT was a wide draw in the flank of a mountain. A stream trickled down from the higher slopes and its banks were treeless. Lucious green grass, besprinkled with wild flowers, carpeted the floor of the draw, and it was rimmed with pine and fir. Midway its length were a few cabins, old and dilapidated, for this had once been a prospecting camp.

This sunset, men and horses were about. The cabins were occupied. There were bed rolls on the ground, surrounded by a clutter of saddle-horse equipment. Smoke drifted lazily from the stovepipes of the cabins; there was an aroma of frying bacon and boiling coffee in the air.

Sheriff John Mack sat in the doorway of one of the cabins; for it was here, southwest of the Seymore trail, that his captors had brought him. Sitting against the wall of the cabin a few feet away was an armed guard, a rifle across his knees. They were taking no chances, these men who had taken him prisoner.

John Mack was not concerned with the guard, not particularly concerned with his predicament; he was admiring the red of the sunset running riot on the western peaks, enjoying the cool, sweet air, and noting with interest the activities going on about him. There were perhaps twelve men in the rendezvous. Of these only three were white men and two of those had been in the party which had captured him. John Mack caressed his cut and swollen lips and thought hard thoughts about one of these—the big, burly ruffian who had led the expedition.

After he had been taken that morning, the sheriff, who had not once been blindfolded, had made careful note of every foot of the trail they had followed. They were somewhere to the southeast of the sequestered valley wherein was situated the outlaw town of Seymore, but, he suspected, they were on the same high range which hemmed in the valley on the east. In other words, they were within striking distance of Seymore, which could be reached by hard climbing.

His conviction as to whose prisoner he was had not once wavered. He was The Buzzard's captive. The archoutlaw had been given word of his progress into the mountains, day by day on that eight-day ride. For the bandit had spies everywhere. They had known he was in Seymore and had merely waited for him to come back down the trail. Then, too, there was José. He had showed up at an opportune time to send word of his start. John Mack could not shake off the conviction that the flashy Mexican had some connection with the notorious outlaw.

But these conjectures were of no avail now. The paramount issue was that he was a prisoner and that the men camped in the draw were awaiting the arrival of their chief. John Mack ex-

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perienced a thrill at the thought that he was about to meet the man he so badly wanted face to face. He forgot the extremely dangerous situation he was in, in contemplating that fact.

Mack had always understood that The Buzzard traveled and operated strictly alone. Then why should he have gathered these men about him at this time? There was but one answer to this and that was that some kind of a raid of considerable proportions was planned. The sheriff believed he knew The Buzzard's objective.

The twilight had descended and filled the mountain draw with its purple mist when a man came with food for the prisoner. John Mack lighted the lamp on the battered table and saw that it was one of the white men, but not one of the pair he had met that morning.

This man, tall and angular, with fishy blue eyes, sallow complexion and a thin, blond mustache, avoided the sheriff's eyes. For a few fleeting moments, John Mack wondered if he could not do something with this man.

As the man put the tin dishes of food on the table with a can of coffee and carelessly spilled out knife, fork, and spoon, Mack made bold to speak to him.

"When is the chief expected?" he asked casually.

The man made no reply and turned to go.

"Just a minute," said the sheriff. "You an' I are white men an' we have something in common, even if I am a prisoner. It isn't going to help me to escape or kick up any fuss—which wouldn't do me any good, anyway—to know how long I can expect to wait before The Buzzard shows up."

The man, plainly a weakling, started and put a finger to his lips, pointing outside where, though he could not be seen, a guard was sitting with his back against the wall. Then, with a furtive look about, he held up one finger. This John Mack took to indicate one day.

There was a chance that this fellow was not there entirely of his own free will. The outlaw might have something on him and thus have compelled him to join the band. Also, it was apparent by the spotted denim trousers and white apron he wore that he was the cook. Surely he did not look like a fighting man. And then Mack had it. The Buzzard had commandeered this man's services in that capacity, either for pay or by force or through threats.

"Well, if you won't talk about that," said Mack loudly, "maybe you'll tell me how many men I've got to fight my way through to get out of here." He laughed sarcastically.

The man held up ten fingers and then three and hurried out.

John Mack turned cheerfully to his supper. He had learned that The Buzzard would be back in a day and that there were thirteen men in the rendezvous. Those were two important bits of information. His thoughts now turned to Lamont, but he soon gave up conjecturing about that gunman's movements. He felt that something was going on under the surface about which he knew nothing and could learn nothing. But surely Lamont would soon learn that he, Mack, had not reached the little foothill ranch which had been his first scheduled stop. If The Buzzard did not act too quickly there was a chance.

Mack went outside after supper. His guard rose quickly.

"Any objection to my taking a little walk?" the sheriff asked.

"No, no," said the Mexican and pointed back into the cabin.

"You speak English?" Mack demanded.

At this point the big white man who had struck him with the gun that morning came up. He spoke rapidly to the Mexican in Spanish. Then he turned

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to Mack with a leer. "Go ahead," he invited. "Walk around. Look the place over. I just told the Mex to plug you if you took six steps from that door. I'm bettin' he'll obey orders, too. If he don't, I'll plug him. I told him that, too." The man laughed brutally.

"An' I'm sure going to find it a pleasure to plug you when the time comes," remarked the sheriff dryly, as he turned back into the cabin.

The laugh stopped. Still, the big man did not answer as he passed on. But Mack knew the order had been given and would be obeyed. He went to bed speculating upon his meeting with The Buzzard. Why had the outlaw taken him prisoner? If he had merely wished to kill him it could have been accomplished that very morning. Did he wish to gloat over him; to subject him to some kind of mental or physical torture? Or did he propose to try to use him in some way to serve his own ends?

The sheriff had had no sleep the night before and had spent the day in the saddle. This night he slept soundly almost from the moment his weary frame hit the bunk. It was broad daylight when he woke. The cook was just putting his breakfast on the table, and it was his presence which had undoubtedly awakened him. But he had no opportunity to question the cook this morning, for the man left immediately.

Mack found it hard to eat, as his mouth was badly swollen. The day passed uneventfully, and he spent it sitting in his doorway, smoking most of the time. His supply of cigars was nearly gone. This bothered him more than anything else, at the moment. There was no activity in the rendezvous. The men played cards and slept. There was, however, an air of expectancy about them. Mack surmised that the chief was due at any moment. But the afternoon passed and there came another sunset, twilight, and supper.

John Mack finished his coffee, wiped his sore lips, looked up, and started from his chair.

He had not heard a sound. But standing just within the doorway was a figure he recognized at once. The Buzzard had come!

John Mack noted swiftly the long, thin nose—like a beak—and the wide, thin-lipped mouth beneath it. The glittering, cruel, black eyes held his for a space. The hands were at the man's sides—hands with long talonlike fingers. John Mack had named this half-breed The Buzzard because of his tactics, but now he saw that the appellation fitted the man himself in appearance. Then came that soft, purring voice—the same he had heard over the telephone, and it angered him as he remembered the incident.

The lips parted in a mirthless grin. "Ah—eet is the sheriff—the Mister Mack?" The speaker's right claw fingered the butt of his gun.

"You know who it is, Buzzard," John Mack retorted. "No need for us to beat about the bush."

The outlaw killer moved in—glided in—and sank into a chair. He was thin and somewhat stooped. He was not young.

"That name you give me, sheriff," came the voice. "Eet is not nice. Why you give me that name?"

"Because that's what you are—a buzzard," said Mack stoutly. "You're a foul bird of prey, an' now that I'm getting a look at you for the first time, I can see that you look like one."

The black eyes snapped fire and the lips tightened. "The sheriff is a brave man. The sheriff is a ver' brave man. But maybe it would be better for him if he did not show quite so much the bluff."

"Don't think I'm throwing a bluff," said Mack angrily. "I don't have to bluff. Not with a coward who will shoot a man in the back. Your dirty

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work at Pinola put five thousand more on your head, Buzzard."

Mack started as he heard the soft, derisive laugh that came from the man's lips without his moving them.

"How much is eet I am worth now?" the outlaw asked.

"Ten thousand at the least," retorted Mack. "But I'll probably get that doubled."

"You will get that doubled, Mister Mack?" The mirthless smile appeared again. "You, Mister Mack?"

"I know what you mean," said John Mack grimly; "but I'm not afraid of you, Buzzard. You dare not harm me. Listen!" He leaned on the table; his face was set and stern, his eyes narrowed. "Let me tell you something, Buzzard. I am not in the least afraid of you. I am not young, for I'm sixty years old. An' I'm not afraid to die, Buzzard. I'm in your power at present, an' although I expect to live to see you shot to pieces or hung, it makes but little difference if you kill me. But don't forget this, Buzzard. I'm the sheriff of a big county. I have a responsible position. I have scores of friends. If you kill me, the very governor of this State will turn out the troops to hunt you down if necessary. You could not get away with it, Buzzard—not in a thousand years."

The look in the outlaw's eyes had changed. The small, black orbs were brimming with malice. "The sheriff has had the many opportunity to get me—if he could," he purred.

"An' the only reason I haven't got you long before this is because you have been hidden an' protected by the Mexicans," Mack retorted sharply. "But you harm me, an' the soldiers will put the curse of fear into their black hearts. Where would you be then?"

"Ah, but I did not say I intend the harm," smiled the killer.

"Then why am I here?" demanded the sheriff.

"Maybe it is that I want to talk with you," was the suave reply. "In you I have the ver' great interest."

"Well, then, talk. What do you want to talk about?" Mack wet his handkerchief and touched his swollen lips.

The Buzzard noted this. "You have the hurt?" he asked.

"From a scurvy white man who has no more principle than to run with such a rotten outfit," said Mack angrily. "He's almost as bad as you!"

"Yes?" purred the outlaw. "Who did eet?"

"Big, bearded fellow who was with the bunch that got me this morning," replied Mack. "But I'll pay him back—not across the mouth with the barrel of a gun, but with hot lead in his heart!"

The Buzzard glided to the door and spoke to the guard in Spanish. Then he returned to his chair and drew tobacco and papers from a pocket. John Mack watched the long, talonlike fingers in fascination as the outlaw fashioned a brown-paper cigarette. He finished it and snapped it into flame with a long thumbnail. There was a step in the doorway, and the man who had struck Mack appeared.

The Buzzard looked at him out of snapping, black eyes and the man moved a foot uneasily.

"You strike the Mister Mack?" the outlaw asked quietly.

"I gave him a tap when he started to shoot off his mouth," growled the man.

"You heet heem in the mouth with the barrel of your gun?" The Buzzard persisted.

"The old fossil had a chance to dodge," was the answer.

The Buzzard leaped like a panther. His gun came out like a flash of light and its barrel crashed against the man's mouth, cutting his lips, breaking and knocking out teeth. Then the outlaw crouched back.

The man emitted a howl of pain and rage. His right hand paused in its drop

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to his gun. His eyes blazed with fury, and his face purpled. His lips were runing blood.

"You draw the gun?" purred The Buzzard. "You want draw the gun? See!" He slipped his weapon back into its sheath with a lightning move. He held both hands above his head. "You want draw the gun? I tell you not to harm the Mister Mack—remember?"

The man hesitated. Then with a curse he turned on his heel and went out.

The Buzzard stood by the table with his back to the door. John Mack could not help thinking what a splendid opportunity this was for a shot in the back from outside.

The outlaw might have read his thoughts. "He no dare shoot from the dark," he said softly. "He die queek, an' he know it."

"He'll get worse than that when I get a chance at him,' 'said Mack, frowning. But he was well pleased, just the same.

"Ees there something the Mister Mack want here?" the bandit inquired.

"Yes, I'd like to have some cigars," the sheriff confessed.

"They shall come to you," the outlaw promised. "An' there is something else?"

"Nothing I can think of," Mack replied.

"Would the Mister Mack like the drink?"

"No, I could always get along without likker when I was in trouble," was the answer.

"Ver' well." The Buzzard nodded. "Then to-morrow, next day, we have 'nother leetle talk. *Buenos noches.*" He was gone almost before John Mack realized it.

For some time the sheriff sat pondering over this remarkable interview with the outlaw. Then he went to the door to look out at the starlit night. A rider came thundering into the draw and dismounted at the cabin next to the one occupied by Mack. His face and gaudy raiment were clearly outlined in the cold light of the stars. John Mack started back with a smothered exclamation.

The newcomer was José, the Mexican!

CHAPTER IX.

JOSE PLUS.

NOW John Mack withdrew into the cabin, but instead of being perturbed there was a smile of grim satisfaction on his lips. Matters were linking up as he had suspected they would. José was a spy and had gone to Seymore to keep an eye out and learn what he could. Probably he had managed to send word of the sheriff's departure. But would he leave the mountain rendezvous while Lamont was still there? That was the question.

Mack doubted it and thus became convinced that Lamont had started out. With Lamont on the trail, there was a good chance he would learn of Mack's capture. Such knowledge would undoubtedly lead to action on his part. The only danger lay in the fact that The Buzzard might act first.

The sheriff did not retire early this night. His light cast a yellow beam out the cabin door into the semidarkness of the starlit meadow. He was waiting for a visitor, although it was mere guesswork on his part. But he was not to be disappointed.

José did not come as The Buzzard had come. He did not appear suddenly in the room or anything like that. He walked into the beam of light and stepped into the cabin jauntily with a bow and a sweep of his ornamented sombrero.

"Ah, Meestair Mack! You come to see The Buzzard?" His teeth flashed against his dark features, his eyes danced; he was a dazzling spectacle in the gaudy clothes he affected, with

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spangles and braid, and cavalry boots with silver spurs.

"I came at his invitation, you mean," said John Mack. "An' now you come to tell me what it's all about. I knew you were hooked up with him from the start, José. You are not so clever as you may think."

"No?" The thick black brows went up. "An' is the great sheriff so clever to let himself be so easy caught with the sleep in his eyes?" He dropped gracefully into the chair by the table.

Jack Mack had no answer to his remark. He was studying this smart young Mexican intently; for here was undoubtedly The Buzzard's right-hand man and his mouthpiece.

"Meestair Mack has the common sense, is eet not so?" José inquired slyly.

"Sometimes," grunted the sheriff. Now it was coming.

"Then the sheriff, he will listen to the talk of sense?" inquired the Mexican politely.

"I'm always ready to listen when a man talks sense," replied John Mack.

"Bueno!" exclaimed José. "That is ver' good. Because eet will stop the trouble for Meestair Mack—the ver' great trouble."

"I'm not afraid of any trouble," declared the sheriff stoutly. "I told this Buzzard just where he stood. I meant what I said. It is he an' you—if you meddle much—who will get into the trouble."

José waved a hand and frowned. "The sheriff, he talk like a windbag. We not afraid of any trouble. If the sheriff think it is all foolish, then he do not have to listen, an' he find out soon about the trouble. This is not foolish, I talk to you about." The frown deepened.

"All right, go ahead," urged the sheriff. "I'm listening."

"Ver' good." But the frown remained upon the Mexican's face. "Eet ees this way, meestair sheriff——" He tapped incessantly upon the table top with the long, tapered, well-kept fingers of his right hand. "You make this man ver' mad at you. He no hurt you much three year ago. Just one leetle raid. But you give heem the name—that Buzzard."

"An' that's just what he is, only worse," John Mack asserted. "He even looks like a buzzard."

José held up a hand. "I will do the talk," he said. "I do the talk because I understan' how better than heem. When you give heem that name, he no like. He ver' much mad. So he go into your county an' he play the tricks. Now, you see? Eet is you that are in blame as much as heem. You make heem mad an' he pay you back."

"He could do that without shooting a man in the back an' killing five others," Mack snapped out.

"Mebbe so." José shrugged in magnificent style. "But that is part of the tricks. Now the man you call Buzzard, he give you the chance. He no shoot you in the back. He no shoot you a-tall eef you show the sense."

"If he shoots me, he better light out for the middle of Mexico!" cried John Mack, bringing his fist down on the table with a force that made the lamp jump.

José's black eyes glittered and narrowed. "Now, you get mad—you no show the sense. You are ready to listen?"

"If you've come here to try an' throw a scare into me, or to threaten me, you're wasting your breath," John Mack declared.

"Ver' good. I no make the threat. I make the promise. You will listen?"

"Go on with what you started," growled the sheriff.

"Ver' good. Now, you see, because you give heem the name this Buzzard, he play the tricks. But there is 'nother man who play the tricks long time. To heem you say, 'No play the tricks any

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more an' I not bother you.' Ees eet not so?"

"You mean Lamont," said John Mack. "Yes, I made a deal with him. But he was an altogether different man than this Buzzard. He was halfway square, anyway. He never shot anybody in the back, an' he never threw his gun down on a man first."

"But he play the trick," José persisted. "He rob the bank an' the mines. He keel the man more than once. An' the sheriff, he make the deal like he say. Now! Why the sheriff no make the deal with this Buzzard so he no more play the trick an' he visit his 'fren' in the desert, an' everything be all right."

John Mack was just about to leap to his feet with a thundering refusal of the proposition, when it came to him like a flash that by putting The Buzzard off he could gain time. He needed time.

"Did he send you to tell me this?" he asked craftily.

"Mebbe I talk for myself," answered José stoically. "What you care? You hear what I ask. Now what you say?"

"You don't think a deal like this is made in a minute, do you?" said the sheriff crossly. "An' I would make no deal with anybody but The Buzzard himself. You have made the proposition. Now you can go while I think it over. Then, some time soon, I will talk with The Buzzard. I'm through listening for to-night. Get out!"

José rose at once, his teeth gleaming in the lamplight. "I go," he said in his old, delicious accent. "I'm sure the sheriff, he will show the sense. *Buenos noches.*" He bowed himself out.

The sheriff prepared for bed with a grim smile playing on his lips. So that was what The Buzzard wanted. He was doubtless jealous of Lamont. He wanted the same deal as the white man had received. Well, he would not get it. But he, John Mack, was assured of gaining the time he needed. He felt he could count on three days at the very least, provided whatever scheme The Buzzard had could wait that long.

John Mack went to sleep pondering the problem of escape.

Next morning he witnessed the departure of José. Evidently, the Mexican had originally come with a message of some kind and his chief had taken advantage of his presence to ask him to speak to the prisoner. Also, this morning two more recruits arrived, one of them a white man. Whatever plan The Buzzard had afoot it required men, and he was gathering them in.

A new man brought the breakfast, but the cook brought the dinner. The guard remained outside the door.

"Look here," said Mack; "you tell your chief, or get word to him, that I want to go out an' take a walk around for exercise. Tell him I can think better that way, understand?"

"I'll try," said the man in a weak voice.

John Mack now spoke in an undertone. "That fellow who came in last night—you know? The Mex all dressed up for a fiesta. Is he around much?"

The man hesitated with a tray in his hand near the door. Finally he answered: "Sometimes," he said.

In another instant a hand had grasped him by the shirt collar from behind and he was sent spinning to the space before the cabin. The Buzzard had come up suddenly, without being heard as usual. The dark, lined features were distorted with rage. His right fist shot out and struck the helpless cook full in the mouth, knocking him to the ground. Then the outlaw deliberately began to kick him—in the ribs, back, and face.

John Mack gripped the table until his knuckles were white, to hold himself in check. It was a mighty struggle to keep from going to the assistance of the misfit on the ground. But he knew the instant he leaped out the door to

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tackle The Buzzard that the guard would shoot. He had to stand there, white and helpless, and watch the cruel, cowardly attack of the outlaw fiend.

Finally, The Buzzard stepped back. The cook lay unconscious on the ground, blood streaming from his cuts. The outlaw shouted in Spanish, and two Mexicans came and dragged the motionless form away. The Buzzard turned to the cabin and for the first time John Mack saw the vicious, unprincipled character of the man in his eyes.

"I tell heem not to make the talk," said The Buzzard. He made no further mention of the incident but stepped inside the cabin, eying Mack closely.

"That was a cowardly business," Mack could not help saying.

"You hear what José say last night?" said the outlaw, disregarding the sheriff's comment. "Now what you think?"

Again John Mack had to struggle to keep from boldly stating what he thought. "What do I think?" he evaded. "I haven't had time to think. What do you want to make a deal with me for when you have me a prisoner an' think you can do what you like?"

"I no explain," said the other, between his teeth. "I no have to explain. I just want. You prisoner, yes—but I no keep you prisoner for long, for you the bother." His black eyes shot a greenish fire.

"That may all be," said John Mack crossly, "but I can't make up my mind in a matter as important as this in a minute. I could say, 'All right' an' then not keep my word. It would be what you deserve. But I keep my word, an' so I can't say anything one way or the other. I want to walk around out there an' think—think a lot."

The outlaw considered this for some little time while the silence in the small room became oppressive. "Ver' well," he said at last. "You can walk round with man behind you. If you try trick, he shoot." With that he beckoned to the sheriff to follow him and went out. He spoke swiftly to the guard.

John Mack walked about the draw most of the afternoon. He did not approach the cabins where the men were playing cards, for he knew that would not be allowed. He did his thinking but it was not the line of thought The Buzzard doubtless thought he was engaged in. The sheriff was trying to figure out a means of escape, but when he returned to the cabin for supper—brought by a Mexican—he had evolved no plan.

He expected a visit from the outlaw that evening, but the man did not come. The clouds had bunched over the mountains, harbinger of a thunderstorm, and the night was black as pitch. The breeze freshened and the lamp flared in the draft between door and window. Mack rose to close the window, which was barred with saplings nailed across it on the outside. There was a flicker of white, and a small square of paper flutto the floor.

John Mack started, looked at it wonderingly, then hastily covered it with his foot. He leaned down, ostensibly to arrange his trousers in his cow-boots, and recovered it. Turning his back to the door he held it in the palm of his hand, waist high, and read:

Stay awake to-night.

With jubilant thrills racing up and down his spine he wadded the paper in his hand and blew out the light.

CHAPTER X.

THE ESCAPE.

FROM the time he scanned the three words on the slip of paper that had fluttered in the open window, Sheriff John Mack had no doubt as to whom the message was from. Alex Lamont was in the vicinity. He had learned that Mack had not showed up at the first stopping place and had come in search of him. The sheriff experienced a warm

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feeling toward the ex-outlaw, if he could be called such; for now that escape seemed in the offing, he realized more poignantly his danger. He knew The Buzzard's reputation; knew he would not hesitate to kill him if he could not achieve his ends.

Mack noiselessly drew a chair near the doorway and sat down. The air had been close and sultry early in the evening, but now it was sharpening and a cool breeze was whistling in the pines. The sheriff knew the signals. Lamont had waited perhaps for just such an opportune change of weather.

Suddenly the air above the draw vibrated with a dull rumble which rolled off down the timbered slopes and was lost in the distant plain. It was the storm's announcement of its coming, the first warning drum-roll of thunder. It subsided, and the breeze freshened in its wake. A white-hot iron seared the sky in dazzling, jagged outline. The thunder broke sharply.

In the moment of the flash, John Mack saw his guard standing in the doorway, his rifle ready.

"Make the light," came a guttural command.

The sheriff struck three matches before he succeeded in lighting the lamp on the table. His guard pointed to the window and Mack swung the pane shut. Then the Mexican came into the room, closing the door behind him without taking his eyes from Mack. He pointed to the bunk and his beady eyes snapped meanly. For Mack there was no alternative but to obey. He lay down on the bunk with his head and shoulders propped up against the stuffed grain sack which served as a pillow. With the guard in his cabin—there, undoubtedly, to avoid the rain and to watch him more closely during the storm—he figured a chance for attack might come.

At this moment the window pane showed white as day and there came a terrific crash. Then the skies opened and the rain fell on the cabin roof with the force of a cloudburst. The storm had burst upon them. The window now was almost continually blue-white and the explosions in the storm-torn skies seemed to rock the cabin.

The Mexican guard sat in the chair Mack had occupied at the table. He was facing the sheriff and his rifle lay on the table within quick reach on his right. His hat was pulled low over his eyes and he tipped back in the chair, smoking a black-paper cigarette. John Mack longed to make a try for it, but he knew better.

By now the rain was making a veritable roar on the roof and to this was added the shrieking of the wind in the trees and the peals of thunder. Suddenly there was a momentary lull; then the window flashed a dazzling blue-white and the draw was filled with an instant crash, more violent than any that had gone before. John Mack sat bolt upright. The lightning had struck!

Dazed for a space of two seconds, the sheriff stared at his guard. The Mexican had slumped in his chair, dropping the cigarette. But he had not been struck, for the lightning had not hit the cabin.

John Mack leaped clear of the bunk and grasped the rifle. He saw blood trickling down the left side of the man's face. Mack's gaze flashed instinctively to the window and he saw the bullet hole with the glass shattered about it. Then the door opened and Lamont stepped inside. He had a gun in his hand, which he passed quickly to Mack. The latter saw that Lamont's two guns were in their holsters. He thrust the weapon into his own sheath and took up his hat.

Lamont held up a finger. "You'll come along with me," he said tersely. "Keep close to me."

He waited a few moments and then, after a vivid flash of lightning, opened the door quickly and the two leaped out-

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side. The door went shut behind them; the lamp was burning. Any one on the outside would think everything was all right. They plunged around the lower end of the cabin as the lightning lighted up the draw.

In the crash of thunder they could not hear the crack of the pistol or rifle, but a bullet cut the flesh of Mack's left arm and the darting tongue of red in the short interval of darkness showed the location of their assailant. Another lightning flash and, as the darkness closed in instantly, there were three flashes of flame, one from Mack's gun, another from Lamont's weapon, and a third from the outlaw running toward the cabin.

Lamont was running now with Mack close behind him. They did not fire again, although there were several shots fired at them. In a short space they were behind a clump of trees a little way below the cabins. The next flash of lightning showed the horses, and Lamont and the sheriff flung themselves into the saddle. Then they were off at a mad gallop across the soggy ground on their way down the draw.

The peals and rumbling of the thunder prevented them from hearing the shouts and shots at the upper cabins. If there had been a lookout at the lower end of the draw, Lamont had disposed of him. They raced into a hard trail, with Lamont in the lead. John Mack gave his horse his head and the animal followed Lamont's mount without faltering. The storm continued to rage, the blinding flashes lighting up the trail ahead, and they galloped through aisles in the forest and slid down slopes. Then Lamont slacked his pace. They came to a little stream and he turned off abruptly, following the bed of this stream northeastward, whereas they had been riding in a southeasterly direction.

Their mounts splashed and stumbled through the water, slipping on smooth rock surfaces, sinking in sand and loose gravel. The overhanging branches, bushes, and willows on the banks whipped in their faces as the wind tore through them. But finally Lamont sent his horse up a long, sloping bank and they were on solid ground again and following a thin trail through a stand of lodgepole pine.

Next, as is usual with an electric storm in the altitudes, the rain began to fall with less force, the wind abated, the flashes came at longer intervals, the thunder rumbled rather than crashed, and the storm rolled along on its way to the lowlands in the south.

Now Lamont again increased their pace. His horse seemed to know the trail, which left the stand of pine and climbed a high ridge to run along its rocky crest. This trail left no tracks and it was extremely doubtful if the outlaws in the draw could have followed them. They were safely away. They cut down from the ridge as the rain ceased and a few stars appeared above the peaks. Thus they came into a narrow valley, and at a shake down cabin in a clump of firs at its upper end they halted.

Lamont dismounted. "We'll rest our horses here for what's coming," he said crisply. "They've come quite a way to-night as it is." He led the way inside the crude cabin and lighted a candle on a rickety table. They sat down on the two stools and he drew a leather pouch from inside his shirt and took out tobacco and papers. He rolled a cigarette and handed it to the sheriff. "Best I can do," he said simply. Mack took the smoke gladly, and Lamont rolled one for himself. They took off their coats and wrung the water out of them, for they were soaking wet.

Lamont asked the sheriff for all the details concerning his stay in the draw as The Buzzard's prisoner, and Mack obliged him promptly, omitting nothing.

"Would you have made a deal with him?" Lamont asked curiously.

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"No," John Mack replied promptly.

Lamont shook his head slowly. "That would have been bad," was his comment. "Dangerous business. He would have killed you. I suppose you know that?"

"I was taking the chance," said Mack.

"An' a long one," Lamont grunted. "Good thing I came along. You an' I are getting even fast, sheriff."

John Mack shifted uneasily in his chair. It was beginning to dawn on him more and more significantly that in all probability he owed his life to the man who sat across from him. In the back of his head he had nursed a conviction that the archoutlaw would not go through with it when it came to killing him. But now, listening to the sincerity in Lamont's voice, he had his doubts.

"I had a sneaking idea all along that you would show up," the sheriff confessed.

Lamont smiled faintly. "Well, sheriff, I let you go on alone because I expected you would be grabbed," he said amiably. "An' I knew that by following the trail left by those who grabbed you, I'd get close to this Buzzard person. An', after the talk he made up in Seymore, I had a hunch that that flashy Mex, José, was mixed up with The Buzzard. An' I wasn't half as mad at Jack as I made out. You know that four-flushing cousin of hers wants her himself—the rat!"

John Mack was astounded. Lamont was even more clever than he had given him credit for being.

"An' now," Lamont continued in a more sober tone, "our work is cut out for us. What do you suppose this Buzzard has that bunch of cutthroats cached over in that draw for?"

"For some kind of a raid," replied Mack readily. "Seems funny to me, though, for he's noted as always working alone."

"He never works alone!" scoffed Lamont. "He's got a bunch of greasers scattered all over this country to give him tips an' layouts an' help him make his get-away—hide him out, if necessary. He sent this José up to Seymore to get a line on you an' to send him word when you was coming out. A Mex left about half an hour before you did. The lookout told me that. José knew he himself would be stopped—he's smart enough for that. He was smart enough to have the word sent down that would pass him when he did want to leave. Which, of course, would be after I left. I don't doubt but that he followed me until he saw me make the lower ranch an' then rode to the draw, thinking I was making for the desert. He had the Mexicans in Seymore all fixed for the raid they've planned—him an' The Buzzard. They're going to try to take the white places in Seymore, sheriff, an' that's why The Buzzard has that gang over there. Now that you've got away, I don't reckon they'll hold off very long. It would be a rich haul, if they could make it."

Thus was John Mack enlightened, and, as he listened to the words of Lamont, he was amazed that he should not have seen through the outlaws' scheme from the start. With the men he had gathered in the draw—a number which would probably be augmented—and the aid of those in sympathy with his plan in Seymore, The Buzzard had a fair chance to rob the rich safes of the two big resorts and make off with a fortune. And, although the town was out of the sheriff's territory, if the outlaw had the promise of immunity he had asked, John Mack would have been unable to do anything about it even if he had so wished. The Buzzard, too, was no fool!

"In an hour we'll get going," said Lamont. "You started out on this thing, an' I reckon it's sort of up to you to finish. We'll need all the able guns we can muster, especially since there's

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a certain white element up there we can't figure one way or the other. I'm thinking trouble is going to break loose in that valley. We'll take a trail I know that leads down into town from the north. The Buzzard's got men on the main trail an' they've got definite orders, don't forget that. An' there's a chance they'll think we haven't gone up to town, which would make it all the better. Now what you going to do, sheriff?"

"I'll trail along," said John Mack, a tremble of excitement in his voice.

"Fair enough, sheriff," said Lamont. "An' I'm not inviting you to any pink-tea party."

He got up and paced the little cabin, while John Mack watched him surreptitiously. Lamont's eyes were glowing with a daring light; the lids were narrowed. His jaw was set. Here was a formidable antagonist for any gunman—for The Buzzard! Every notch in Lamont's gun represented one of his own kind—a dangerous character who had been death on the draw. When his face set in stern lines he took on ten years in appearance. The Buzzard hated him and was jealous of him. What would happen if these two met? And what of José, the flashy one, with his knife and gun? The thrill of adventure—of danger—came to John Mack as he had not felt it in years.

Lamont went outside. The sheriff blew out the candle and then followed him. The storm had passed and the moon was riding the high skies in a sea of stars. Lamont walked about the meadow and often looked up at the stars and the dark hulks of the mountains. The conviction came upon John Mack that Lamont was thinking of the girl. José wanted her! And if Lamont should have to kill José, what then? Perhaps this very thought was making Lamont restless. But the sheriff did not attempt to intrude upon the man's thoughts.

Suddenly, Lamont stopped near him. "Sheriff, there's liable to be all kinds of a mix-up," he said, half to himself.

Before Mack could comment on this, Lamont was again striding away on the wet grass. Then he walked rapidly to the horses. "We'll start," he announced.

They mounted, and with Lamont in the lead started up a steep trail at the head of the little valley.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RAID.

SILVER dawn was flooding the peaks and valley when John Mack and Lamont halted their mounts on the mighty ridge north of Seymore. Far below them the town slumbered, with no sign of life save for three spirals of smoke which curled from the chimneys of three adobes in the Mexican quarter. Possibly, John Mack did not take particular notice of these, but Lamont studied them intently. It was a peaceful scene with a few herds of cattle grazing, horses along the stream—grass, and trees, and encircling slopes, an emerald green.

"We'll follow along the ridge an' go down the west trail," said Lamont, touching his horse's flanks with his spurs.

The sun was up and shining through the east gap into the valley as they came down the steep west trail, passed the lookout, and rode along the trail to town. Lamont did not stop at the Guerra cabin. They pulled up in front of the hotel.

"You better get some sleep, sheriff," Lamont advised. "I'll be doing the same thing as soon as I've attended to an errand or two. I'll put up at the hotel myself. I'll go in with you an' see that you're fixed up. Never mind the horse; I'll take it along to the livery with mine."

They went inside and Lamont awakened a man in a room behind the little

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lobby. He spoke to the man in an undertone and Mack was immediately shown to a room. The sheriff welcomed the opportunity for rest, for it had been a hard ride and the drenching in the rain had brought a touch of rheumatism. John Mack felt his sixty years this morning. He pulled off his boots, removed his outer garments, and crawled into bed with a grateful sigh. In a moment he was asleep.

Lamont took the horses to the livery and then repaired to the Combination, the doors of which never closed, and went upstairs to Thompson's rooms. He remained half an hour and then he, too, went to the hotel and sought some sleep. But, unlike John Mack, he slept fully dressed and with his guns at hand.

John Mack awoke suddenly. He saw by the slant of the sun across the carpet that it was late afternoon. He was rested, alert as soon as he opened his eyes, and obsessed with the feeling that some one was in the room, or had been there. Something had roused him. He looked slowly about and then sat bolt upright in bed.

In a chair by the window, José, the Mexican, sat smoking.

"Ah—the meestair sheriff is come awake," said José with a dainty flourish of his cigarette. "You have the good sleep?"

John Mack looked at the closed door. The key was in the lock. Had he been so tired he had forgotten to lock the door? His room was in the second story of the hotel and the Mexican could hardly have used a ladder to enter through the window in broad day.

"How'd you get in here?" he demanded.

"By the door," replied José, with a lift of his fine black brows. "I knock an' there is no answer. The door is not lock'. So I come in an' wait for the sheriff to get through with the sleep."

"Well, you can go out the same way you came in," said John Mack angrily. "An' you're lucky I'm letting you go." With this, the sheriff realized that he had hung his gun on the bed post above him and it was in an awkward position for a fast draw.

"But no," purred José. "I must make the talk with the sheriff first. I am come here for that," he concluded in a stern voice.

The sheriff's eyes flashed and his face reddened. Suddenly he reached for his gun.

"Don't touch it!"

The words, sharp and clear, stayed John Mack's hand. He turned for a swift look at José. The Mexican's eyes burned into his own and he saw the right hand within the man's ornate vest. The knife! Swift, and sure, and silent! The sheriff's hand came down.

"Ah—now the sheriff show the sense," came the low, vibrant voice of José. "You see, you have not the chance. But I no mean the harm. Remember, there are the bad men in thees town—ver' bad men. Suppose I tell them the Meestair Mack, he is the sheriff? What happen?" The Mexican laughed softly, mirthlessly, and John Mack knew very well the odds were on the other's side.

"Now!" José leaned forward, his eyes holding the sheriff's gaze as if he had cast a spell over him. "You make the deal with that Buzzard?"

Since José had left the morning before his escape, John Mack knew he could know nothing of what had happened in the draw, unless a messenger had carried the news to him. Then it occurred to him that Lamont might have seen to it that all entering the valley were stopped and questioned; Mexicans especially.

"You will have to ask him," he replied. "You know him well enough."

"Si, señor," purred José. "He is the great fren'—like that I know heem. But you are in the danger here so I like to know if you make the deal so I can be

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of the help to you." He smiled graciously.

John Mack shook his head. "I can't tell you a thing," he said stoutly. "You ought to know that. You'll have to ask The Buzzard himself. You know where he is, an' if he's such a great friend he'll tell you quick enough."

The Mexican's eyes narrowed, but John Mack caught the glimmer of perplexity in them. José was not sure of himself! He did not know of the events of the night before. The sheriff hastened to cement his advantage.

"You see how it is, José? I cannot talk. You know I am a sheriff, for The Buzzard told you, of course. I cannot talk about any deals I make. It would not be good policy." He paused, while his listener's eyes clouded. "I guess you've got sense enough to understand what I'm getting at," he finished coldly, scowling.

"Mebbe so," said José in an uncertain tone. "Will the sheriff tell me, did he see the Señor Lamont when he come back?"

"I came right to bed," Mack retorted angrily, throwing back the covers and getting out of bed to dress. He was careful not to move near the gun belt hanging from the bedpost. "Is he in town?" He began to dress without remonstrance from the Mexican.

Now José seemed more puzzled than ever. It was all too apparent that he was not sure of his ground. Suddenly he rose.

"I am going," he said. "I think the sheriff make the deal or he no be here. I think that way. If not, eet is mebbe bad. I tell the sheriff it would be good for heem to leave this town. If the sheriff, he no believe an' stay——" He shrugged and backed to the door. "But the sheriff will show the sense," he said, with a venomous look that was more potent than a spoken threat.

Then he opened the door and backed out, closing it after him.

John Mack hurriedly finished dressing, pulled on his boots, and buckled on his gun. He went downstairs to the lobby and inquired for Lamont. He learned from the man in charge that Lamont had gone out some little time before.

From the hotel, Mack sauntered across to the Combination. There he knew he would find Thompson and there he expected to find Lamont. He found neither and went to the lunch counter for something to eat. He was conscious of being the cynosure of all eyes, but he feigned not to be aware of the fact. He had just finished his coffee when a soft, purring voice spoke from behind.

"Ah, the meestair sheriff, he gobble the eats."

John Mack rose from his chair to confront José. The white teeth of the Mexican gleamed; and Mack knew the man had learned of his escape. He was in a serious predicament, as men of the law were not welcome in Seymore and neither Thompson nor Lamont were present.

"Good joke, José," he said cheerfully; "but all men have to hang on the feed bag occasionally."

José turned to the men at the gaming tables and the crowd at the bar. "You know," he said suavely, "who we entertain? No? Eet is the Sheriff Mack from down in Baynesville—from the desert. Now, why is Sheriff Mack here? Ah!—that is a question!"

An ominous muttering came from the men in the room, accompanied by dark looks.

But John Mack merely smiled as he bit the end off a cigar. "I came to see the scenery," he said complacently. "I am not looking for anybody here."

A big bearded man kicked back his chair from a table and stepped forward. "You've seen it," he snarled; "now, beat it!"

John Mack was no coward. He took

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the cigar he had lighted from between his teeth and looked the big man up and down. "I haven't seen enough of its characters yet," he replied coolly.

"Well, you're seeing one now," the big man blustered. "How do you like him?" He thrust out his chin, while the crowd murmured in approval.

"You've probably got your good points," was John Mack's retort. The sheriff was fighting mad and oblivious of every one in the place but the man before him.

"Why you——" The bully's voice was silenced as the rear door opened and Alex Lamont and Thompson entered, followed by several others.

Lamont took in the situation at a glance. "Why all the fuss?" he demanded.

"Your friend the sheriff, he make the bold play," smirked José.

"Shut your mouth, you white-livered Mexican," Lamont snapped out wrathfully. Then he looked at the big man and squared off in front of him. "This man," he said sternly, indicating Mack, "is my friend—at present an' for all purposes. Does that go?"

"Takin' the law on yore side?" sneered the big one.

Lamont stepped forward, his eyes narrowed. "Now, is this thing going from here?" he asked sternly. "Do you want to start something small when there's something big coming up? If you do, I'll drop you in your tracks!"

Thompson, the sheriff, and a dozen other men lined up behind the speaker, who bit his lip and then turned away. "All I've got to say," he muttered, "is that it is the first time I've ever known a sheriff to be in this valley. If he's under your wing, it's all right with me."

There was a sudden silence as all in the place listened.

Sharp and clear on the still evening air a volley of shots broke with deadly sharpness. There was a rush for the front doors.

"Good guns an' true stay here!" rang the voice of Lamont, and several of the men turned back.

Then the thing which Lamont and Mack expected happened. Men broke through both front and rear doors—the band from the rendezvous in the draw, augmented by others from the Mexican quarter of the town. White men who resented the presence of John Mack refused to participate in what followed.

Lamont turned swiftly to the sheriff and pointed at the smiling José. "Keep him covered!" he ordered sharply. "Back him into the office there!"

There was time for no more to be said. The shooting started, and the raid was on. Men dropped to the floor to avoid the gunfire. Thompson's gun blazed from behind the bar. The invaders fell, shooting. The lamps had not been lighted and the big room was dim in the afterglow of the sunset.

Lamont stood near the big stove, reloading his guns. He was watching both entrances keenly for the man he knew would come. A last fitful gleam of the sunset fires lighted up the front entrance as a figure struggled through the throng that was crowding out.

It was a rather slight figure, with a hooked nose the color of dull amber. On either side of the nose two small, black eyes glittered. The long arms and hands hung like talons.

The Buzzard had come!

The shooting and struggling ceased with his arrival. The sinister personality seemed to fill the room.

Lamont stepped out. "Come on, Buzzard!"

The man slipped forward along the bar as a girl came in the rear. There was a little cry and the girl stopped, her hands against her breast.

Neither man paid any attention to the girl. Their eyes were locked.

"Come on, greaser!" Lamont's voice seemed to thunder in the heavy silence.

Two moves—so lightning fast as to

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be simultaneous—two shots that sang as one. Lamont leaped quickly to the right. The Buzzard leaned against the bar with a queer grin on his lips. Slowly he leveled his gun, and—it fell from his hand. He slipped quietly, easily to the floor, with that same ghastly grin upon his thin lips.

The girl screamed and ran forward. There was a shot in the little office. Then a lithe figure hurtled over the bar. John Mack had missed!

Dolores flung herself on Lamont just as the knife flashed like a silver arrow in the dim light. It found its mark in her bare shoulder. Lamont brought up his gun.

"No, no, no!" sobbed the girl.

Again the white teeth of José flashed. "Señor Lamont! You have made me wound my cousin, an' you have the honor to have keeled my father!"

The gun came down. With his left arm about her, Lamont withdrew the knife. As it clanged on the floor, Dolores fainted in his arms.

CHAPTER XII.

"YOU AND I ARE EVEN!"

THEY were sitting in the living room of Señora Guerra's cabin. Night had fallen long since and the valley was flooded with moonlight. Señor Guerra and Sheriff John Mack were studying each other in the subdued rays from the shaded lamp. The señora was first to speak.

"Him you call Buzzard was my husband's brother," she said quietly. "But he was no good. He never came here."

John Mack cleared his throat and shifted in his chair uncomfortably. He found solace in thrusting an unlighted cigar between his teeth. He cleared his throat again, but did not speak.

"You need not feel too badly," said the señora. "I know you came here for him and why. It doesn't matter, and it is all over. It was to come some time. I"—she hesitated for a moment—"I am sorry Alex, Señor Lamont, had to do it. That is all."

Still John Mack could think of nothing to say.

Then Lamont came into the room, and at the same time José entered by the front door. At sight of him, Señora Guerra rose in swift anger.

"You come here?" she cried. "You would gladly do murder the same as your father! Leave my house! You are not of my kind of family—you——" She broke off her speech as her indignation overwhelmed her.

José laughed meanly and looked from John Mack to Lamont. Then he spoke swiftly.

"I am just come to say to Señor Lamont and the meestair sheriff that they have done well because they have had the luck. Adios!"

He turned sharply on his heel and went out into the night.

When the men looked away from the doorway through which José had disappeared they saw the girl, Dolores, standing by her mother. Her left shoulder was bandaged.

"Jack, come here!" Lamont commanded authoritatively.

She ran to him with a glad cry, and he took her in his arms. As he looked over her shoulder at John Mack, the latter nodded in approval.

"I'm sorry, girlie," Lamont said softly. "Now—do you blame me?"

"No, no, no," she answered quickly, putting her good arm about his neck.

He kissed her long and tenderly. "Now go to bed. You must not be up with your—your hurt."

She obeyed him willingly, and he motioned to the señora to leave them. When the woman had gone, he turned to John Mack. "You an' I are even," he said crisply.

"Of course," Mack agreed, showing surprise. "We've been that ever since we made our—our agreement."

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"I mean more than that," said Lamont. "I kept my part of that agreement."

"An' I kept mine," the sheriff retorted.

"Very well, we were even then," said Lamont coldly. "An' then you came up here an' asked me to get The Buzzard. I got him."

"An' I'm paying you ten thousand for the job," said Mack sharply.

"But I'm not taking the ten thousand," said Lamont.

"What? Why, it's all provided for, an' you're entitled to it!"

"I do not kill men for money," said Lamont in slow, even tones. "You are now under obligations to me. I cancel those obligations by going free, an' wild, an' handsome again."

"You mean you are going back to the old game?" cried the sheriff, starting from his chair. "You mean——"

"That if I do," said Lamont in tones of ice, looking the sheriff straight in the eyes, "I do not have to respect your territory! That is the price of the bullet that dropped The Buzzard!"

The sheriff rose, white-faced. "If I had suspected any such thing," he said grimly, "I never would have come to you for aid. It's treachery!"

"An' I saved your life in the bargain when I got you out of that draw, for I know you wouldn't have given in," said Lamont sternly.

For some moments the two men faced each other. Then, "I'll be going," said John Mack.

"You have safe-conduct out of the valley an' down the trail," said Lamont. "but, if you have any sense, you'll stop at Thompson's place to make sure of it. Good-by."

"Good-by," said the sheriff, as he went out.

As he rode down the valley, he looked back once, to see the tall figure of Lamont on the porch of the cabin. His next thought was of the desert.

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

NEW PRAISE FOR THE SOUTHWEST

THERE has never been any lack of appreciation from artists of the beauty of the Southwest. Paintings innumerable have succeeded in capturing some of its magic beauty, and writers are never weary of recording its enthralling charm. But here is an artist who gives a reason for the faith that is in him. Mr. Walter Ufer, N. A., whose paintings of the great Southwest have recently been exhibited in New York, is a devout admirer of the part of country he depicts. He says:

"I believe that if America gets a national art it will come from the Southwest rather than from the Atlantic seaboard. The strong beauty which the Southwest holds is what keeps us here."

The artist lives in Taos, New Mexico, and every line of his paintings shows how deep and heartfelt is that appreciation of that beauty which surrounds him.

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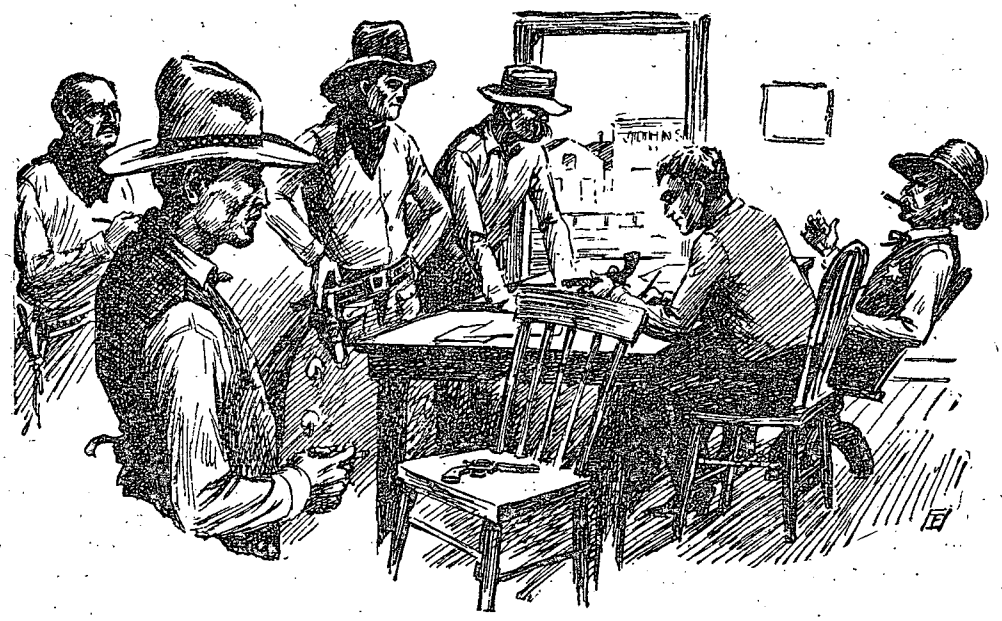

Shorty Goes Backward

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "Shorty Goes 'Cuckoo'," etc.

THE committee of three from the Blue Mesa ranching district sat in Sheriff Joe Cook's office in Monte Vista, puffing on fat, black cigars that the worried sheriff had passed to them. The committee was scowling, to a man, as Sheriff Cook talked.

"Yuh gents please keep yuhr shirts on!" begged the sheriff, attempting to cast oil on the troubled waters. "I kin sure appreciate yuhr feelin's, bein' a lover o' good hossflesh myself; but I gotta admit that me an' my deputy is kinda stumped on this case. We've worked hard to solve it, but——"

"Waal, yuh got to solve it, sheriff," interposed "Slim" Heath, one of the Blue Mesa ranchers, emphatically; "that's why us committee gents is here to-day. The deestrict ranchers met yesterday an' chose us three to come in an' demand action. Ef they ain't purty quick action, thar won't be a good hoss left on the mesa."

The sheriff threw out his hands in a pitiful gesture.

"Gents, don't I know it!" he declared sadly. "But kain't yuh see what I'm up agin' on this case? They ain't no motive to go on, in the fust place, an' likewise, tharfore, no clews. I thought at fust it was a matter o' plain vengeance when them heavy hosses o' Frank McCabe's was kilt off—I figgered it was a enemy o' Frank's did it. But then them five haid o' saddlers belongin' to Victor Wingren was bumped, an' my revenge theory is all blowed up."

Slim Heath spoke again.

"Yeah," he said, "them two cases was just the start o' the hoss massacre, sheriff. Look at the boys as has lost stock

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in the last two weeks—Bert Clark, an' Harry Lane, an' Johnny Pitt, an' Sherman Turner, an' Jim Maxwell, an' Roy Mack, an' Clarence Jones, an' Marty Madigan——"

"I know it!" admitted the sheriff grimly.

"An' then, night before last, the dang killer gits them blooded Arabian saddlers belongin' to Jimmy O'Donnell," went on Slim Heath angrily, "an' yesterday noon George Eade finds four o' his critters shot to death in a pasture."

"Waal——" began the sheriff, struggling for appropriate words; but at this point his deputy, "Shorty" McKay, who had been silent ever since the Blue Mesa committee had filed in to complain, spoke up. He got to his feet so that he might be more impressive.

"Gents," he said, staring hard at the dusty committeemen, "Sheriff Cook is too modest to admit it at this time, but I think all o' yuh gents ought to know that he—that we—is right smack on the track o' the feller who is shootin' yuhr hosses. Yes, we're on the trail, boys, an' it'll only be a matter o' a few days until—until we've got the miscreant stored away in cold storage in our jail, awaitin' the justice that he has got comin'."

The members of the committee pricked up their ears at that. Looks of amazement flitted across their bronzed countenances, looks that were almost instantly replaced by satisfied expressions. No one looked more amazed than the sheriff himself, however. He started to get up out of his chair, but Shorty, with one hand on his shoulder, forced him down.

"The sheriff is about to git up an' try to tell yuh that I deserve most o' the credit fer all this solvin' o' the hoss murder mystery," Shorty hastened on; "but I won't let him say the words. We has both worked on the case, an', gents, yuh carry this message o' comfort an' reassurance back to the mesa with yuh from us—that the sheriff an' his energetic deputy—bein' me—has the situation well in hand, an' before many o' yuh kin hardly believe it, we'll have the hoss killer snug in a jail cell."

"Waal!" exclaimed Slim Heath.

"Now, that's the talk!" added Lee Raedel.

"Hurrah fer yuh birds!" put in Doc Corney.

After that, while the sheriff was still flushing in dismay—a flush that the committee mistook for modesty—the three riders from Blue Mesa clattered off in the afternoon sun, headed home with Shorty's message of reassurance. The sheriff waited until the thud of the hoofbeats had died away in the distance. Then he raised a sad face to Shorty—a face utterly devoid of hope.

"Shorty, yuh blabberin', blunderin', bold-tongued imbecile!" groaned Sheriff Cook mournfully. "Ef it ain't enough to be thoroughly licked, as we are in this hoss-killin' case, without yuh ballyhooin' news o' a fake victory in sight! Solve that case in a few days—why yuh're crazy! Ain't we tried our level best to solve it in the last two weeks, since the killin's started, an' got nowhar? An' when we fail to live up to what yuh jus' promised the committee—that we'd have the hombre in the can in a short time—what in heck are they goin' to think o' us? Have yuh thought of that, loud mouth?"

Shorty rolled himself a cigarette with elaborate care.

"Waal, boss," he drawled, tilting back his chair as a slow grin spread across his youthful face, "why not be cheerful about the whole biz? No use, I figgered, in admittin' failure to them committee fellers. It's a cinch that we'll continue to work on the case, an' we may solve it—we got plenty o' time, later, to confess we're licked. Why should we confess it to-day?"

Sheriff Cook shook his head.

"Waal, mebbe yuh has postponed the

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storm fer a few days," he admitted; and then his voice sharpened. "Shorty, as long as yuh saw fit to do that braggin'—that we've got the killer—I reckon we gotta redouble our efforts. We gotta work day an' night; we gotta lay ambushes; we gotta tail every single suspicious character; we gotta mount guard over hosses clear through the whole county; we——"

Shorty blew a few smoke rings ceilingward.

"We gotta be angels, flittin' hither an' thither with the speed o' express trains, ef we do all that," he remarked, chuckling; "an' thar's nuthin' new in any o' that, boss. We've tried all them stunts. Every night we laid a ambush the hoss killer struck somewhars else; we've investigated every suspicious character we knows o', an' we've guarded one hoss herd after another, only to have the killer strike the herd we ain't watchin'."

"True enough, Shorty."

"We've exhausted all ordinary measures o' ketchin' the man who is shootin' hosses in this county," went on Shorty; "now we gotta resort to unusual methods. I was doin' a heap o' thinkin' while that committee was in here yarpin' its head off, an' I think I've lit on the right idear. We'll let that hoss murderer ketch hisself, boss, accordin' to the rule o' Esnes Nommoc."

Sheriff Cook blinked. "Esnes Nommoc?" he repeated dubiously. "What's that, a new patent medicine, or a smart city detective, or what?"

"Esnes Nommoc," said Shorty, "is the solution to all this hoss-killin' business—mebbe. At any rate, it won't hurt to try. Now lissen, sheriff. We've told the committee we is hot on the trail o' the killer. Waal, we'll pertend we are. We'll kinda relax. Yuh'll set an' rest here in the office fer the next few days, remarkin' to one an' all that it's merely a question o' hours until the hoss slayer falls inter our trap. As fer me, I'll do a few mysterious passes, as it was, to kinda throw the killer off guard; an' then, ef all pans out accordin' to my way o' thinkin', thanks to ol' Esnes Nommoc, we will have our man, an' the ranchers kin cheer us until they're exhausted."

Shorty's enthusiasm was not contagious. The audience looked glum.

"Esnes Nommoc ain't that ol' Piute Injun medicine man that yuh usta pay so much attention to, is he?" asked the sheriff.

"No!" said Shorty. "But I'll tell yuh what, boss—Esnes Nommoc is our las' bet, I figger! No use in layin' more ambushes, trailin' more suspects, guardin' more hosses—we has tried all them things an' fell down. Now, it's up to Esnes Nommoc, an' ef yuh got any hope o' ketchin' that killer——"

The sheriff shrugged.

"Oh, go ahead with Esnes Nommoc then," he agreed, without spirit. "I don't git yuh—but I guess all other measures has failed."

And what the sheriff said was true enough. All other measures to solve the greatest Monte Vista mystery in years had failed. Some one, identity unknown, had been shooting horses all through the Monte Vista territory. The killer had picked only the best to kill, too. He had picked the heavy work horses, and the good cow ponies, and the fancy saddlers, in many a ranch pasture. In each case his procedure had been the same. A bullet through the head, and another expensive animal was coyote food. The best efforts of the sheriff and Shorty, and the combined work of the outraged ranchers, had failed to catch the killer. True, the tracks of his horse had been found near many of the equine bodies, but that was all. No one could figure who was up to the dirty work, nor why. The committee from the Blue Mesa had come in to urge the sheriff to greater effort, as a last resort. When the committee returned, bearing Shorty's assurance

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that the horse slaughter would soon end, there was jubilation on the mesa; but it was short-lived, indeed. That very night, Dave Chuven and Dan McAuliffe, Tarryall Creek ranchers, lost three head of saddle stock apiece. The news reached Monte Vista next morning.

"Now," said Shorty to the worried sheriff, "yuh set calm, boss. This new hoss slayin' don't alarm yuh one bit. Yuh expected it. Fer reasons yuh kain't explain now, the time ain't ripe fer closin' in on the killer. That's yuhr game from now on—calmness, complacent calmness. As fer me, I'm out goin' through a few monkeyshines to fool the killer. Yuh git me?"

"I don't," said the sheriff frankly.

No one else "got" Shorty, either, it seemed, when he took Bert Cole and Jack Dea out from town with him and insisted on burying two of the horses slain the night before. There was considerable mystery about the burials, too. Graves were dug by the three men and the animals interred before any one was the wiser. And questions failed to bring forth any answers from Shorty, or from Bert Cole or from Jack Dea. That evening, however, the Monte Vista *Clarion* carried the announcement that Deputy Sheriff Shorty McKay, working according to the rules laid down by Esnes Nommoc, had discovered, that day, that the horse killer that had been slaying stock on the Monte Vista Ranges was using a .45-caliber revolver in his work. Esnes Nommoc had revealed this to McKay, it was stated, and for that reason the deputy had ordered all men possessing .45-caliber revolvers in the Monte Vista region to appear on Friday, the fourteenth, at the sheriff's office, and register said guns with the sheriff.

"Good gosh!" exclaimed the astounded sheriff, when he heard of Shorty's orders. "Does that galoot expect the killer to come in, meek an' like a lamb chop, an' register his .45 smoke wagon? An' what ef this Esnes Nommoc is wrong about the caliber o' the gun used? I tell yuh, Williams, all this stuff has got me guessin'!"

Billy Williams, editor of the *Clarion*, put a discreet question.

"Who is this Esnes Nommoc bird Shorty is talkin' about, eh?"

"Ef he's a bird," said the sheriff wearily, "yuh kin bet yuhr bottom dollar that he's a sleuth o' some kind. Shorty wouldn't pay no heed to nobody else in a case like this. Mebbe he's a scientific detective like the kind that is always solvin' mysteries in books. I don't know him myself, but I figger that's who he is, ef it is a he. It might be a new kind o' headache pill, or a magic exclamation, or——"

"Nonsense," said Williams, "it must be a man's name."

So the next day the Monte Vista Clarion carried a story that the sheriff's office was solving the horse killing mystery by following the advice of the great international detective, Esnes Nommoc, who had solved so many important cases. The editor, without coming right out and committing himself cold, intimated that Nommoc had once been with Scotland Yard, the Northwest Mounted Police, the Pinkertons, and the United States Secret Service. The article settled it as far as Monte Vista was concerned, it seemed. All who had heard Shorty mention Esnes Nommoc decided that Shorty wasn't so dumb after all, if he had enlisted the aid of such a sleuth as the *Clarion* declared Nommoc to be. Even the Blue Mesa ranchers brightened up.

But Shorty said nothing—not even to the inquisitive sheriff.

Fully a dozen more head of horses were slaughtered by the mystery killer, however, before the fourteenth of the month arrived, and with it the day for the registration of all .45-caliber guns in the community. The owners of such weapons began to arrive early in the

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morning, and a fairly steady stream poured in all day. After the last comer had registered his .45 late in the evening, the weary sheriff looked abjectly at his weary deputy.

"Waal, Shorty," said the sheriff sarcastically, "ef that gent Sir Esnes Nommoc was tryin' to git a line on the killer from this .45-caliber-gat registration ter-day, I reckon him an' yuh failed to do it. My tally shows that only two hundred and seventeen gents was in to register .45's—an' thar's no proof the killer brung his in, either. Ef this know-it-all Sir Nommoc expected to investigate all the .45 owners, I kinda guess yuh got some jobs on yuhr hands, Shorty. Only two hundred and seventeen gents to check up on, an' no tellin' ef the killer is really among 'em! An', meantime, the hoss killin' goes right on."

Shorty looked sharply at the worried sheriff.

"Ef Esnes Nommoc was right, as I think," said Shorty, in a low voice, "one o' the two hundred and seventeen gents that was in here ter-day registerin' his rod was the real killer o' them hosses! Oh, don't look so surprised, boss, I ain't drunk! Huh, he wasn't only here, I has grave reason to believe, but he was here this afternoon. Yeah, I kin go further than that an' say that he was here some time durin' that rush between five an' seven o'clock this evenin'—but that is as far as I kin go."

Sheriff Cook leaned forward over his tally sheets and from all indications did not seem to be encouraged.

"Waal," he said, in a mollified tone, "ef that was the case, I reckon yuh narrers the field o' suspects down to about thirty-five parties. Thar was approximately that many birds in here registerin' durin' that supper-time rush; but, gee whiz, yuh kain't investigate thirty-five fellers any more than yuh kin fully probe two hundred and seventeen."

Shorty smiled and lit another cigarette.

"Accordin' to the rules o' Esnes Nommoc," he remarked softly, "I figger I'm on the right track."

"Lissen, Shorty," begged the sheriff, "yuh tell me one thing. How do yuh know that the killer was in here durin' the rush hours between five an' seven—tell me that, will yuh?"

"Esnes Nommoc——" began Shorty with assurance.

"Oh, Esnes Nommoc yuhrself!" exploded the sheriff, and in his wrath he jumped to his feet and shook a finger in Shorty's face. "I wasted five good hours las' night lookin' through books to try to find out something about that Nommoc hombre—an' I don't find a word! Who is he, an' what is he? I looked through the Lives o' Famous Men an' Wimmen, the Good Book, the encyclopedia; four history books, a volume on mythology, an'——"

But Shorty, getting to his feet, hurried out, leaving the sheriff sputtering. Later that evening, the sheriff and Billy Williams, the *Clarion* editor, looked over some other books at the Monte Vista public library, but when nine o'clock closing time came they had failed to discover any trace of any Esnes Nommoc. The editor, however, had not entirely wasted his time, for he learned from the sheriff that Shorty, guided by the mysterious hand of the elusive Nommoc, had determined that the horse killer was one of thirty-five Monte Vistians who had been in to register .45's during the rush hours.

"Say," exclaimed the editor, "that's a story to print. That's good detectin'—no matter who this Nommoc feller is who is helpin' Shorty. Yuh reckon Nommoc could be in town here himself?"

The sheriff laughed coldly.

"Naw," he said, "he'd 'a' popped in here ef he was, no doubt. Ef he ain't in a book, he's coachin' Shorty by mail.

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He may be some wise-crackin' Denver detective fer all we knows!"

But that night Charley Burns, rancher on the Wolf Creek Road, southwest of Monte Vista, lost eight head of fine work horses. Each one was shot in the head by the mystery killer. Charley was in next morning to complain to the sheriff, and while he was so engaged Shorty slipped out of the office. Again accompanied by Bert Cole and Jack Dea, Shorty went to the Burns ranch and before Burns had reached home the trio had buried one of the dead horses. The three departed without any explanations to the astonished Mrs. Burns. It was about noon, that day, that Shorty came hurrying into the sheriff's office, his face all aglow with smiles.

"Waal," said the sheriff, who was still suffering from the stinging remarks on laziness, inefficiency, and ignorance that the angry Charley Burns had made to him, "why all the foolish grinnin'?"

"Me an' Esnes Nommoc is gittin' hot on that killer trail, boss," he reported, "an' everything is practically over but the shoutin'. Ef yuh will hand me that scratch pad, I'll be writin' out a little message I'm gonna send to that hoss shooter. Gimme yuhr tally sheets on the gents who owned the .45's, too, boss, an' then, ef yuh'll go down to the Elite Feed stables an' tell Art Wachter, an' Tom Lahey, an' Cy Mann, an' young Hadley, to come up here, with their hosses, I'll be eternally obliged to yuh."

The sheriff hesitated, but on second thought, with a grunt, he decided to do as Shorty asked. He tossed over the scratch pad, the tally sheet, and a pencil—and departed for the Elite barns.

When the sheriff returned with the four mounted men Shorty had named, he found that his deputy had about three dozen sealed and addressed envelopes ready. Shorty distributed the missives fairly evenly between the four men—and his instructions to them were brief enough.

"Deliver them notes, boys," he said, "an' I'll see that yuh're well paid fer yuhr time. Git 'em all delivered to-day, sure!"

Then, as the messengers rode away, Shorty turned to the sheriff.

"Ef the rule o' Esnes Nommoc ain't away off," said Shorty, "yuh an' me will have that hoss killer to-morrow mawnin'; in fact, I'm so dog-gone sure o' it, boss, that yuh better notify that Blue Mesa gang—that committee—an' mebbe Billy Williams, the editor o' the Monte Vista *Clarion,* to be here in the mawnin' to see the fun."

The sheriff's tired eyes brightened with hope.

"Who is the killer—confidential—Shorty?" he whispered.

But the sheriff's hope died a sudden death.

"I honestly don't know," said Shorty.

The Blue Mesa committee was on hand early the next morning, however, as was Billy Williams, the editor. The sheriff had decided not to ask them in, after Shorty had admitted that he did not know who the horse slayer was, but Shorty had attended to the invitations himself, it appeared. And soon after the committee and Williams had established themselves with the sheriff in the latter's back office, the first of those to whom Shorty had sent notes the previous day began to appear. Shorty had pressed Henry Genty, a friend, into service, to receive the callers in the sheriff's outer office. The visitors were ushered into the private office one by one, and there Shorty, seated at a desk, with the committee, the editor, and the sheriff watching in amazement, asked each caller the same question.

"Yuh got my note?"

"Yes."

"Yuh brought in yuhr .45 ag'in, as I asked?"

"Yes, sir."

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"Lemme see it."

"Sure—here it is."

"An' yuh brought in yuhr .38 as well, as I asked?"

The replies of the visitors varied as to the last question. Many of them agreed that they had brought in their .38-caliber guns as Shorty had requested. Some, however, denied owning a .38 at all. Shorty carefully examined each .38 presented to him for inspection. Those who claimed to have none, he questioned carefully. At the end of the first hour of receiving his invited callers Shorty had the sheriff, the editor, and the Blue Mesa committee completely at sea.

They bombarded him with questions between visitors.

"Keep yuhr shirts on," advised Shorty grimly.

The second hour of questioning passed as the first had done. Shorty examined a number of .38-caliber guns brought in by the callers. Likewise, he carefully questioned those callers who arrived without .38's and denied owning such weapons. The third hour was well along when the sheriff, and Editor Williams, and the Blue Mesa committee, tired of the ordeal now, suddenly sat up at the strange tone in Shorty's voice. He was questioning one Albino Aranda, a Mexican rancher from the lower part of the valley. Aranda had brought in a .38-caliber revolver and offered it to Shorty for inspection.

"Whar yuh git that rod, Aranda?" was Shorty's first question in the sharp tone that had aroused the official audience.

"I buy heem," answered Aranda.

"Whar?"

"In Salida."

"When?"

"Oh, two—tree years ago!"

"What made me ask, Aranda," said Shorty, in a softer tone, "was because I see thar are no numbers on this gun—the serial numbers has been filed off. Do you know anything about that, Aranda?"

"*Si*," said Aranda. "I buy heem from a feller I now teenk mebbe is one thief. I dunno. I notice later no numbers on gun."

"Yuh got it two—three years ago in Salida, Aranda?"

"*Si*—that is right."

Shorty grunted. He reached in one vest pocket and took therefrom a small screw driver. He deftly loosened the long screw that held the bone panels of the gun handle in place. As he removed the panels, a slip of white paper fluttered to the desk. The eyes of the Mexican grew as large as saucers. Shorty, with the gun leveled at Aranda, picked up the piece of paper.

"I'll read what it says on this slip of paper," he said easily. "'This gun stolen from Shorty McKay, Friday, the fourteenth'." That's all, Aranda—but it's enough! Esnes Nommoc told me that yuh'd steal it, Aranda, an' now Esnes Nommoc tells me also that yuh are the bird that has been killin' them hosses. Why did yuh kill 'em, Aranda? Answer me that—quick!"

And the gun came up as the Mexican blinked.

"Quick—before Esnes Nommoc tells me that!" said Shorty.

"I am pore man," said the Mexican, shivering. "I have bad luck on ranch—no crop, no hoss feed, my hosses wither an' die. I teenk ef pore man no have hosses to plow, why should rich man have 'em? I get mad. I steal pony an' I ride around, keelin' rich man's hosses—but now I am sorry."

"Kinda late to be sorry," said Shorty, and he clicked his handcuffs on Aranda. "Yuh was blamed smart, homber, in yuhr crooked work, but not smart enough fer Esnes Nommoc!"

And then, while his audience looked on in amazement, Shorty ushered his prisoner back into the jail, to the rear. When he reappeared, Shorty was ready

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for the bombardment he knew would be his.

"Afore yuh ask me a wagonload o' questions, I'll explain," laughed Shorty, looking from the sheriff to the editor, and then to the Blue Mesa committee. "It was kinda simple, after all, seein' I followed the rule o' Esnes Nommoc all the way. When the mesa committee was in here the other day I realized that all ordinary measures o' ketchin' the hoss killer had failed. I decided to start all over ag'in—ferget ambushes, herd guardin', an' the like—an' use ol' Esnes Nommoc. To do so effectively I wanted to work out my own plan, an' I got the sheriff here to agree to let me do as I please, kinda.

"Fust off, I decided from the locations o' the hoss killin's that the killer was a local man. He worked in a radius o' a few miles o' Monte. So far so good. I let it be known that Esnes Nommoc was helpin' me, to kinda make things more impressive. Then me an' Bert Cole an' Jack Dea went out an' buried a coupla o' the dead hosses, jus' to cover up the fact that I had operated on 'em an' removed the death bullets, which I found to be .45 slugs. I then ordered the registration o' all .45 gats, believin' the killer wouldn't dare to stay away fer fear o' excitin' suspicion. The hosses was buried, so no one would get wise as to how I knowed .45 slugs kilt 'em.

"When the registration day fer .45's arrived, I kept a tally with the sheriff. Likewise, I left my own .38 gat on a chair near the table, whar any one could take it ef they wanted it. It vanished during a rush between five an' seven o'clock. I had hoped to see who got it, but I failed in that part. But I knowed that one o' about thirty-five men who registered in them two hours got it. I remembered who was in about that time—one or two—an' from that I could figger from the rotation o' names on the tally sheets who the others were who registered .45's about that time. Before puttin' my rod out to be stole I put that piece o' paper in it, an' memorized the serial numbers, too.

"That night more hosses were shot to death, an' we buried one to cover up the fact that I had probed fer the pellet. This time the slug was a .38, bearin' out my idear that the killer might be afraid to use his .45 ag'in after registerin' it, thinkin' me or Esnes Nommoc might have a way o' checkin' on it. He used a .38, an' it was a chance that it was my .38. So I wrote notes to all o' the thirty-five men I suspected. All the notes read the same: 'Please come in on to-morrow mawnin', bringin' yuhr .45 yuh registered here an' likewise yuhr .38.' I took it for granted that they all had .38's. I examined the .38's brought in fer my serial number. I questioned those who didn't bring in any .38's, an' would have investigated them thoroughly later ef I hadn't come across Aranda's .38 without a serial number. It had been filed off. I figgered I was hot then, so I unscrewed the handles an' out came the note reading: 'This gun stolen from Shorty McKay, Friday, the fourteenth'; an' Aranda was so surprised at that, o' course, that I tricked him inter admittin' quick that he was the hoss killer, which he is!

"An' that, gents, is about all—except that I figger that worry over his misfortunes, the failure o' his crops, an' the death o' his starvin' hosses, kinda made Aranda a bit goofy, so that he went in fer the plan o' killin' off the hosses of his richer neighbors. O' course, I admit that I took a long chance on some o' the solvin' o' the case, but, accordin' to the rules o' Esnes Nommoc——"

Billy Williams, the editor of the Monte Vista *Clarion,* could stand the suspense no longer. He jumped to his feet, pad and pencil in hand, a wild look in his eyes.

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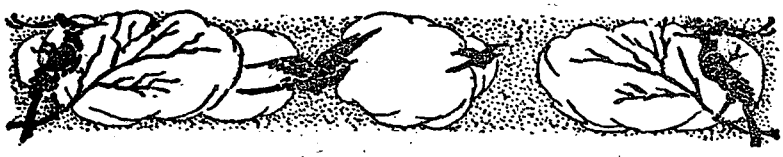
"Fer the love of holy smoke, Shorty," he cried eagerly, "don't keep us in the dark about that guy Nommoc any longer! Who in the heck *is* Esnes Nommoc? I hand it to him, whether he's a dick, or a palmist, or a book, or a ol' Greek god, but who is he?"

Shorty grinned on the bewildered assemblage.

"Jus' because I wanted to kinda mystify the boss here, an' likewise make the killer think I was gittin' help from some strange source, is no reason fer yuh folks to git so excited over pore ol' Esnes Nommoc," said Shorty. "Why, yuh all know Esnes Nommoc, or oughter, seems to me. Mebbe I've kinda got his name twisted a bit—backwards, fer instance. Spell 'Nommoc' the other way around an' yuh git 'Common', an' reverse 'Esnes' an' yuh git 'Sense'. They ain't nuthin' very mysterious about that, is they?"

The editor sat down with a sigh. He spoke for all present.

"No," he admitted, "there isn't!"



BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

Slate-colored Junco

(Junco Hyemalis)

ALMOST any winter morning one may see the husky little junco hopping over the snow in search of crumbs of bread or seeds. It is about the size of an English sparrow, except that its body is smaller and its tail a trifle longer. While the back, head, and wings are gray, the breast is white. The bill is flesh-colored, and, in flight, white feathers show at the sides of the tail.

Because of the season of their arrival, the juncos are by many called snowbirds. Wherever there are shrubs and fences not entirely covered by snow, the juncos will be seen huddled in groups of thirty or forty, or flitting here and there picking up food. The small trees and shrubs offer excellent concealment in case of alarm.

While these friendly little winter birds do not mind the cold, they do die in quantities when the snow and ice become so heavy that all means of procuring food are shut off from them. It is at this time that they must depend upon thoughtful human beings to throw out crumbs to them. Weakened by loss of food, they are easy subjects for prowling cats. Almost any seed that may be purchased at a bird store will be relished and will keep them from starving. Seeds from the sunflower, poppy, millet, oats, cracked wheat, and cracked corn are suitable.

While the juncos associate primarily with their own kind and ward off strangers with extended wings and snapping bills, they often follow in the wake of larger birds, such as wild turkeys and partridges, in order to pick up the leavings from their scratchings. During a particularly cold spell they hover about farmyards and burrow little holes in the haystacks where they rest in snug warmth and comfort.

During the night, early in the spring, the junco leaves the warmth of the Southern States and flies to New England, Canada, and Alaska where it breeds. The birds find in these regions blueberries, and thus vary their diet.

Among the roots of an upturned tree or in a depression in the ground, the junco makes its nest, and lays four or five speckled eggs. The slate-colored junco is only one of many species, but is probably the best known.

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Highways Old and New

(The Custer Battlefield Highway)

By Edna Erle Wilson

A DECADE ago a new highway, stretching from Des Moines, Iowa, to Glacier National Park, Montana, was originated by W. D. Fisher, of Sheridan, Wyoming. As in its course it traverses the old trail used by General Custer and his men, it was quite fitting that this new Western thoroughfare should be given the name of the brave general who lost his life at the well-remembered Battle of the Little Bighorn. The scene of this tragedy is one of the many historic and scenic spots which unfold in swift succession and capture the imagination of all who follow the Custer Battlefield Highway.

During its fifteen hundred miles from Illinois to Montana there is no other trail which offers the thrill seeker a richer reward in picturesqueness and variety. He will have the opportunity of seeing the Indian in his native haunts, living as he did in the days when the West was primitive and unconquered. He will meet the Powder River cowboy with his longhorn cattle, and view him in action at one of the great Western round-ups. He will be introduced to trout streams and the wild life of our national forests, will pass through progressive cities, and through towns made famous by some of the most romantic and fearless frontier characters.

As he enters the Black Hills country from the East over the Custer Battlefield Highway, the tourist finds himself in a land unexcelled in pioneer history, Indian lore, and unique scenic effects. Here in a country a hundred miles

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square, which constitutes the Black Hills and Harney National Forests, he invades the traditional hunting ground of the Great Spirit, a region regarded by the Indians with awe and superstition. In the White River Bad Lands, which may be reached by a side trip via Cedar Pass to Interior, then north to Quinn and Wall, he is offered a strange sight not to be seen elsewhere in the whole world. As he stands on the brink of the Bad Lands and gazes over the canyons he sees a great and sinister city spread out before him, for the series of unheavals and erosions that compose this region have, curiously enough, taken the shape of massive buildings, of castles with turrets and towers. If his visit happens to be at sundown, the visitor will find his illusion of a dead city heightened by the weird play of shadows. Some of the most interesting spots to be seen in the Bad Lands are Kadoka Point, straight south of Kadoka; Cedar Pass, seventeen miles west and three south of Kadoka, and the Pinnacles, eight miles south of the town of Wall.

Another side trip along this part of the highway to tempt the wayfarer is one to Custer State Park. This, South Dakota's first State Park, created by Honorable Peter Norbeck, former governor of the State, has the distinction of being the largest State Park in America. Within its one hundred thousand acres are such lofty peaks as Harney, towering seven thousand two hundred and forty feet, and Sheep and Buckhorn Mountains, both over six thousand feet in height. A beautiful gem in an appropriate setting is found in Sylvan Lake, while the Park abounds in gorges and canyons, undulating valleys, pine-clad hills, and swiftly flowing streams teeming with mountain trout.

As the trail threads its way through the Black Hills from Rapid City and Sturgis, those who wish may explore Crystal Cave on beautiful Elk Creek Canyon by leaving the main route between Piedmont and Tilford at the mouth of the canyon. The cave, one of the largest yet discovered, which originated from a geyser long extinct, consists of many great rooms and galleries filled with treasure in the way of crystal hangings, with beautiful pools and lakes. No matter which of the various routes the adventurer takes through Crystal Cave, he comes upon some new and surprising example of Nature's handiwork.

Leaving Sturgis, South Dakota, the highway approaches one of its most striking landmarks in Bear Butte. From this butte over four thousand feet high, bare of vegetation and commanding notice for miles in every direction, the Indians once watched with fear and resentment the advance of palefaces from the East.

Another point memorable of the days when the white men were invading the Indian country stands just two miles east of Sturgis. This is Fort Meade, built in 1878 to protect settlers in the mountains and foothills from their redskin enemies.

And but a short distance ahead on the trail is the town of Deadwood, reminiscent of so many stirring sanguinary scenes during the days of the gold rush to the Black Hills country. Here one refreshes his memory of the deeds of those vivid pioneer characters who helped to make the town famous: "Wild Bill," Preacher Smith, "Calamity Jane," and "Deadwood Dick." On Mount Roosevelt, about two miles from Deadwood, stands the first monument erected to commemorate the life and work of Theodore Roosevelt. From this spot a long-to-be-remembered view may be had of North Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming.

After visiting Deadwood, those who are curious to see a gold mine in operation will be strongly tempted to deviate once more from the main highway for

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an excursion to Lead, the home of the great Homestake, the largest gold-mining concern in America. The Homestake mine has beeen in operation since 1877, and has to its credit a total output of about two hundred million dollars in gold, its present annual output being about six million dollars.

Not far from Lead is located one of the two splendid recreation parks established by the Custer Battlefield Highway Association. A fine mountain stream runs through the seventy acres which comprise the park, while two ice-cold springs, plenty of shade, fireplaces, and tables will make many want to linger here on their Westward journey.

Spearfish, South Dakota, is the next stopping point on the main route of the highway. A short distance from this town one discovers in famous Spearfish Canyon scenery so gorgeous as to rival that of the Grand Canyon of the Arizona. From Spearfish, via Belle Fourche, one may visit the Orman Dam, the largest in the world. One may also attend at Belle Fourche, if one arrives there at the proper season, one of our greatest Wild West Shows, the Tri-State Round-up. Here, every July, hundreds of cowboys and cowgirls gather to contest for the ten thousand dollars in purses awarded for the most courageous and daring stunts.

Returning to Spearfish, the Custer Battlefield Highway soon after crosses the South Dakota boundary, arriving at the interesting town of Sundance, Wyoming. Sundance Mountain, at whose base the town nestles, is a famous one in Indian legend, for at the natural amphitheater on its top the red men made their laws and performed their famous Sun Dance, from which ceremony mountain and town derived their name.

Sundance is the gateway to the famous Devil's Tower. This natural obelisk, rising twelve hundred feet above the banks of the Belle Fourche River, is one of Nature's most unique freaks, and in its shape and structure is without counterpart. It came into being long ago as the chimney of some subterranean furnace which overflowed with molten rock, and cooling, crystallized downward. The great basaltic pillar is eight hundred feet in diameter at its base, and tapers in a graceful convex to a prism that extends unbroken from base to summit.

The highway, resuming its course, next reaches Sheridan and the Big Horn National Forest, which includes the most picturesque parts of these mountains. The traveler is refreshed by vistas of snow-covered peaks, whose lower slopes are covered with virgin spruce and pine. Large herds of cattle and sheep graze upon the thousands of acres of alpine meadows within the boundaries of the forest. In this reserve may be found nearly every species of wild life once native and abundant throughout the West, such as elk, deer, bear, and so forth. Over twelve hundred miles of streams filled with speckled trout delight the soul of the angler.

Twenty-five miles west of Sheridan the trail leads into the Crow Indian Reservation, the home of the eighteen hundred surviving members of this tribe. In its fifty-mile journey through this great Indian reserve the highway offers much variety in the way of scenery, from the most rugged canyons along the Big Horn River to the level, irrigated valleys which form the farming lands of the red men.

We are now approaching that historic section from which the Custer Battlefield Highway derived its name, the site of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, which took place June 25, 1876. Proceeding north from Lodgegrass about twelve miles, opposite the mouth of Reno Creek, the trail reaches a point directly opposite the place where the Custer force came down from the East. It leads through the very valley crossed

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by Reno's battalion in its first approach to the Indian camp. On a hill adjacent to the road the tourist may see the foundation of the marker for the Unknown Soldier of Indian Campaigns, which was placed there on the fiftieth anniversary of this battle.

About three miles from Crow Agency, Montana, one arrives at the Custer Battlefield, turning back a page in pioneer history that thrills the heart of every true American. Adjoining the battlefield is the National Cemetery, where over fourteen hundred pioneers killed in battles with the Indians are buried.

The thoroughfare reaches in its next stop, Billings, an important point along its course. This Montana town is the gateway to the Cody entrance of Yellowstone National Park, and there are few tourists who will not turn aside here or at the Gardiner entrance via Livingston, for a glimpse of the remarkable geysers and volcanoes, canyons, and petrified forests, to be found in this, the Nation's largest park.

Billings is also headquarters for the Bear Tooth National Forest, a mecca for mountain climber and fisherman. Excellent mountain trails lead into the high country of the reserve, while those who prefer to linger beside the streams are rewarded by a rich catch of mountain trout.

In fact, throughout its course, the Custer Battlefield Highway abounds in exceptional recreational opportunities. In the Jefferson National Forest, reached by way of Great Falls, Montana, the angler or hunter many satisfy his most ardent dreams of success with rod or gun, the beauty lover his ideal by following a mountain trail, every lap of which offers new delights, to beautiful Crystal Lake, in the Snowy Mountains.

After a stop in the Lewis and Clark Forest, reached from Choteau, and a visit to the Blackfeet Indians on their reservation near Browning, the Custer Battlefield Highway speeds on to its grand terminus in Glacier National Park. In exploring this great park, fifteen hundred miles square, with its rugged mountain peaks, glaciers, picturesque lakes, streams, and waterfalls, the traveler over the Custer Battlefield Highway adds a last colorful experience to a journey rich in knowledge, pleasure, and thrills.

A WOODEN INDIAN WEDDING

THERE was recently held in Cleveland a round-up of the wooden Indians which formerly decorated and marked cigar stores. The winner was "Seneca John," who was made in Tiffin, Ohio, more than fifty years ago. To John was awarded a prize of fifty dollars. This was doing pretty well for an old wooden Indian, but fate had other good things in store for John.

A well-known automobile manufacturer who specializes in American antiques has long possessed an Indian squaw made of wood. The lonely figure distressed his sense of efficiency, perhaps, or maybe he remembered that all good things go in pairs, so, when Seneca John put in an appearance, he seemed an ideal companion for the wooden lady and was accordingly added to the manfacturer's collection. The name of the squaw has not been learned, but it has been suggested that Elizabeth, or its Indian equivalent, would seem to be a satisfactory title. At all events, the wooden figures have been united and are destined to pass a peaceful old age in the museum of the automobile manufacturer.

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That Dog-gone Dog!

By Austin Hall

Author of "Desert Cunning," etc.

THE millionaire oil man and plunger, Tom Carey, smote the table with his fist. At the same time a blast from the hurricane struck the rickety frame of Crocker's Station and heaved it from its foundations, lifting it up, and then dropping it back for another attempt. Outside, a gray scum littered the air—opaque and impenetrable, a flying terror of drifting débris. Under the door a layer of fine sand spread over the floor.

But Tom Carey was not thinking of the storm; he was a plunger, a man accustomed to action and high stakes; and just now he was playing poker with Pierre le Sette, the big sheepman. Tom had discovered that three aces don't amount to much when they bump up against four jacks. All day Tom had been playing in just such luck, drawing hands that any gambler would bet on; only to have the grinning Frenchman top them with something just a little bit better. The big Pierre touched the pile of chips with his fingers, picking them up and dropping them back with a caressing fondness. His smile was maddening.

Zaripp! Boom! Brrr—baroom!

The hurricane was the greatest in years. Inside the walls of Crocker's Station—miles out in the desert—a motley crew had taken refuge—oil men, sheepmen, herders, riders. The sou'wester had risen up from nowhere and was moving the face of the plain. Lucky was he who had made the shelter of the station; men clung to themselves, and waited. Pale faces told of their anxiety. From the seat close by the door came the voice of Bob Arnold's sheep-herder, Jean la Jeannette.

"So!" he said, fondling his old dog's ears. "She's zee bad one. Jean she's

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live many long year; but never before she see one storm lak heem. Ou la la! Many sheep and many people she get lost for sure. *Mon Dieu!* And she come up queeck. Lak flash of lightning. *Rip, bing, boom!* No time for notting."

Jean had been on his way to the mountains along the west side of the valley when, half a mile from Crocker's, the storm had hit him; and he had been literally blown along the plain toward the door. Once inside, he had called his dog to a corner. The crowd within the station had been promptly marooned. The big roadster of the millionaire oil man had found shelter behind the building. But Tom Carey was not the man to let down because of a hurricane; every moment of his life meant action. He had sought out Pierre le Sette, as a proper opponent, and set out to acquire a band of sheep. That is, he had started. From the second hand on, Pierre had dug deeply into Tom's bank account. Tom followed the three aces with a straight, to have it beaten by a flush of the same order. His face turned crimson.

Just then a telephone rang in another room, and Jim Crocker, the proprietor, thrust his head through the door.

"Telephone," he called. "Telephone for Mr. Carey."

Whereupon the oil man stood up, walked back to the other room, and picked up the receiver.

"Yes," he said expectantly. "This is Carey. Hello! This is Carey, I say. Carey. Yes, Carey, C-a-r-e-y. Tom Carey. Hello! What the heck! This is Carey, I say! Speak louder, I can't hear you."

There was a pause while the millionaire vainly endeavored to pick out sounds. He frowned with the effort to hear. He looked at Jim Crocker, the proprietor; and in at the card table. He spoke again.

"This is Carey. You want Tom Carey? Oh, the dickens!"

He dropped the receiver and nodded to Jim Crocker, saying: "See if you can get them. Sound to me like they're over in China. Ask 'em what they want."

He waited while the other listened. Old Jim Crocker screwed up his jaw; his eyes glanced toward the ceiling.

"Can't make it out," he said at last. "But whoever it is, they're calling Tom Carey. Seem tuh be excited about something. Sounds like a woman's voice."

Upon which the oil man nodded; then he stepped back to the other room.

"Mostly dikely it's the wife," he said, by way of explanation. "She and the little girl are over in Garber City, safe and comfortable in the hotel there. She should worry! But I wonder how in heck she trailed me over to this hole in the desert. I was on my way to the oil fields. That's what I told her."

Tom Carey was a regular man—big, healthy, robust, a demon for work, and a quick thinker; but like many men of large affairs, he was apt to get impatient, even with his wife who was the apple of his eye. Also, there were times when he was superstitious; especially when he sat in a card game.

"Well, if she calls again," he went on, "tell her that Tom Carey is busy. Tom's going to get into the sheep business before he's through, and don't you forget it! I'll bust this French wool-grower if it takes my whole bank account. But I've got to turn my luck. There's a jinx in this room somewhere. Sure is."

A gambler is the most superstitious creature on earth; and Tom Carey was no exception. He stood up to walk around his chair; and just then he spotted the dog behind him—old Rex, the champion sheep dog. Immediately, he started forward.

"Oh, ho!" he cried, above the blast of the hurricane. "I thought so. It's that dog-gone dog! Here, you cur, get out of here. Get!"

And with that, he let drive with his

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foot, kicking out angrily. He started to open the side door. Then he kicked again.

Immediately, something happened. A form, none other than that of the sheep-herder crouching in the corner, leaped through the air, and swung at Carey's jaw. Instinctively, Carey shifted to protect himself. His own fist shot out and caught the body of his antagonist, driving him up against the wall. But the sheep-herder bounded back like a rubber ball, and with him came something else—a heavy sheep dog lashing for the oil man's throat, knocking him back. The table went over with a crash, and Tom Carey went down. Pierre le Sette uttered a yell, and leaped.

"Non, non!" he shouted. "Jean! Jean la Jeannette! Rex! Rex! *Non* Rex!"

Just how close he had been to death at that moment, Tom Carey never knew; but his position was not comfortable. From the security of his back he watched his late card partner pulling off the big sheep dog; heard him splattering French at the herder. The crowd began assisting the oil man to his feet. It looked like the beginning of a nice fight. But Tom Carey was not that sort of a man. He wiped his eyes.

"Huh!" he said suddenly. "It serves me right. Of all the durn fools! As if it was the dog's fault that I couldn't draw the cards. 'Frenchie,' I owe you an apology, a thousand times. All my fault. But that's the dog-gonedest dog I ever did see. He didn't leap until I hit his master. He——"

And that was Tom Carey all over; great, gruff, and possessed of a gunpowder temper, but for all that just as quick to relent. That was why men loved him—because he was blessed with that rarest grace of a true sportsman, he knew how to apologize. Tom Carey would not have done a wrong for all the gold in the world; and the stakes at the card table were to him a mere bagatelle. He stuck out his hand. Jean la Jeannette, slightly battle-scarred and still shaking, took it in his own. The hand grip was a true one—the warmth of two kind hearts fused together.

"Ou la la!" said Jean la Jeannette softly. "She's all mistake for sure. Jean mebbe she's jump too quick. But no one keecks zat dog. Eh, monsieur?"

Strange to say, the luck of the card game changed from that minute on. Henceforth it was Tom Carey who held the high cards; and it was Pierre who tried to lift himself from under. The pile of chips dwindled; and soon it was Pierre le Sette who was writing out checks.

"Guess I go into the sheep business, after all," said Tom Carey exultantly. "Eh, Pierre? How about it?"

And Pierre nodded a mournful head.

"Mebbeso, monsieur," he said listlessly. "Mebbeso. But zat sheep she's out in zat hurricane. You go get 'em, eh? How 'bout it?"

An hour passed—two, three hours; time has no meaning for a card shark. The phone continued ringing, and on each occasion Jim Crocker did his utmost to reply to it. Tom Carey was beaming; he was not worried a bit.

"It's just the wife," he said. "That's a woman all over! Worried for fear I'm lost. Thinks I'm a baby three years old. But that's what we love 'em for—because they baby us. She's the greatest girl on earth. Oh, well, Tom Carey knows he's perfectly safe. And he's just won six more sheep. Eh, Pierre?"

But had Tom Carey known the import of that telephone call, he would have moved heaven and earth to find out what the speaker wanted. Nor did Pierre le Sette know that some miles to the south his sheep-herder had gone under and that the pack under his care were being driven before the storm. Also, the dogs with the flock were young and partly trained. The dickens was to

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pay with Pierre le Sette and sure enough.

The game went on. No one worried; no one, that is, but the sheep dog in the corner. The old dog had apparently taken the fight as a closed incident, and under his master's behest had squatted on a mat close by the door. The afternoon wore on toward evening, and still the storm boomed madly on; there was no let up—no recess from the roar. It sounded like the day of doom.

But just about dark, old Rex seemed to stir up suddenly; his nose lifted, and he listened. No one noticed him at first, for he was merely a dog. But he kept listening, until finally he thrust his cold nose against the door and began to snuff. Something was in the wind. Again and again he sniffed. Then he began to whine. Some one spoke to Jean la Jeannette.

"Hey, Jean! Your dog wants out. Better see what he's after.

Then Jean la Jeannette turned about. "Ou la la!" he answered. "Mebbeso they's dog outside. Mebbeso some one come. Eh?

Jean opened the door, as he did so, the blast of the hurricane filled the room, dashed out the newly lighted lamps, and hurled the playing cards in an eddy against the wall. An angry shout went up:

"That dog-gone dog again! Hey, you!"

But Jean was not fighting this time; his answer was soft and ready.

"Ou la la," he said. "Zat dog she smells something. You bet! So Jean she's let him out."

Old Rex had smelled something, sure enough. He had a scent in a thousand; and he was not to be mistaken. The wind means a terror of commotion to man, but to a dog it is sometimes an open book. Rex had caught a message, clean cut, not to be taken lightly. And, being a sheep dog, he could not but obey.

But it was not easy. The darkness had settled in and the wind rose in its fury. The first blast threw the dog against the side of the building; but after a second or two he recovered enough to advance against the storm. Crouching low and working slowly, he made a little headway, until all at once there was a lull—though the wind never stopped. Then he hurried on, running low, with his body down for the next blast.

It was not the first time that the old dog had fought a windstorm, and experience is a good teacher. He knew how; and he kept right at it. There were times when he flattened out; when the rain of twigs and gravel went over his head like fine shot. But he never turned back; each move brought him a little ahead, and at last he came to a shallow *barranco* that gave him a decided advantage. Here his headway was considerable. A mile, two, and then the ditch stopped. Straight south by west went the big sheep dog—through the darkness, through the storm, toward something that drew him like a lodestone. Nothing in the world could have stopped him, not even Jean la Jeannette. There was a scent that carried—a whimper that seemed to come from the storm. The dog could not hear the whimper; but he could sense it.

And had Tom Carey known what was going on, he would have been a wild man indeed. Here is what had happened:

Carey had left his wife and three-year-old daughter at Garber City. He had started for the oil fields some sixty miles away, and had stopped at Crocker's Station for refreshment, when, like a thing out of nowhere, the storm had struck. And Tom Carey was a man who knew the desert. Out in the level dry lands there are just two things that defy a man to keep his bearing—one is a fog, and the other is a sandstorm. Of the two, the sand is by far the worst; it keeps moving and will bear a man

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off his course; and it obliterates all sign of a road. The wise thing to do is to sit down and wait for another day; which was just what Tom Carey proceeded to do. Inside the station he had met Pierre le Sette; hence the card game. Besides, Pierre was rich and powerful and could play for stakes, and that suited Tom Carey.

But Tom's wife was another person altogether; she was city bred; and her chauffeur was about the biggest young tenderfoot that had ever driven off the pavement. The thought had come to her that it would be a wifely thing to drive on to the oil fields and give her husband a nice surprise. Ten minutes later she had summoned her limousine and, with her little girl beside her, was being driven out into the desert. It was all wonderful, and the little one was enjoying it immensely; the way was straight ahead, and the sun was shining down. Besides, the limousine was a powerful car; and there was not a particle of danger. Only—the desert is also a powerful thing, and, in addition, is as whimsical as the sea. All had gone well for possibly thirty miles, then, all of a sudden, the storm struck. The desert seemed to moan, to lift itself up, and start northward. In an instant, all was an opaque madness. The way was wiped out before their eyes. It was like a nightmare!

The chauffeur was new to the country; Mrs. Tom Carey equally so. There seemed to be nothing to do but keep driving until they came to some sort of habitation. But in doing that, the driver took a toss-up with fate. He began running in a wide arc, hour after hour, the engine pitting itself against the storm, and the frightened occupants crouching inside. The day drifted along, while the terror-stricken chauffeur clung to the wheel, driving slowly. That he did not run into a *barranco* was a miracle; and even as it was, something almost as bad happened. The big car was loaded with sand and particles that drifted through the cracks. Finally, the gray scum began taking on a brown tinge; night was coming on. And just as it did, a sharp piece of quartz ripped open a tire. The chauffeur stepped out to replace it. In no time it was dark indeed. The big headlights pierced twenty feet ahead and then stopped as though they had run up against a stone wall. The young man ran to the rear of the car and pulled off a spare. In another instant he was working at the wheel, head down, to keep the sand from his eyes.

And then the thing happened!

The child, cooped up for hours, took a notion to open the door and watch the driver. She slipped to the running board and onto the ground. And at that instant a furious blast of the hurricane picked up her little form and forced her out into the darkness. In the split part of a second!

The mother screamed and dashed after her. Before one could wink they were gone! The chauffeur was stunned. In fact, he scarcely realized what had happened. Then it came to him, all at once. They would be lost in that terrible darkness. They must be given some sign. So he hastily moved the car to bring the focus of the headlights in the direction that the woman and child had taken; then he returned to the seat and began blasting with his horn.

But all to no purpose. The hurricane roared and that was all. They had gone so quickly that it did not seem possible. One minute he had seen the pink dress of the little girl scooting before the wind, and the next second the mother was running behind her.

And in such a storm! The night was like pitch; they did not have a chance. He waited an hour, two, and then he began giving up hope. What should he do? His batteries were going dead from continual blowing of the horn. And it

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did not look like as if the mother and child would ever get back to the machine. Finally, he decided it was best to drive on until he could find some sort of help.

This was the message that old Rex had picked out of the wind. He could scent the trouble that lay ahead. Through the darkness he had worked his way forward, with the scent growing stronger every minute. Finally, it was right in front of him. A child! A little girl lay half stunned on the ground; sometimes she would lie still in a sort of bewilderment; and then she would stand up to be driven ahead by the wind. Then the child's hands touched the dog's fur, and she heard him whine.

A big dog! The old fellow licked her face and barked softly. She knew it was a dog.

The little girl seemed to understand; she felt about his neck. She was not afraid. She heard the old dog's whimper of affection, and caught her hands in the hair behind his shoulders.

"Doggy! Doggy! Doggy!" she cried.

All as simple as could be. A dog and a child—and a sympathy past understanding. The child, the frailest thing in the desert; and a dog who knew all its vagaries. Great pictures may be made out of little things!

They were out in the night alone. But the old dog knew what to do. He had caught still another scent and he waited, leading the child to the left and occasionally whining and licking her hand. The wind had driven the child ahead of the mother; but now the mother was coming near them. A moan came out of the darkness—a sob, and the next moment a mother's arms were clasping her babe.

It was too wonderful to be true. The mother was frantic with joy. And then she began to understand. This strange old sheep dog had somehow picked up her child—had directed her little footsteps to her mother. She sobbed and wept; her voice whispered in the storm:

"Oh, you good old doggy! You dear old dog! Now we can go to your master. He'll know how to help us."

And so with the child on her arm and her hand on the scruff of Rex's neck, the mother followed the dog as he went with the storm; until suddenly she found herself under the lee of a hill where there was shelter from the wind. She felt something warm beside her and touched it. A sheep! A flock had been driven into the shelter of a coulee. A lost flock! The dog had stopped and was lying down; and the exhausted mother and little child lay down with him. The dog crouched up close and the place was warm. Some hours passed; and then came a break of light. A flicker of dawn appeared from the east. And simultaneously the storm began to abate.

All the while the telephone at Crocker's Station kept ringing; until in the end it began getting on the proprietor's nerves. Just the same old story; some one wanted to talk to Tom Carey; then the voice would blur into a rumble. About midnight Tom Carev had crawled into bed, bunking with Pierre le Sette. About four in the morning, Old Jim Crocker slipped out to start another day. The telephone began ringing again. Perhaps he could hear this time. Jim Crocker took down the receiver.

"Hello?" he called.

"Hello," came the answer. "Is this Crocker's Station?" This time the voice was clear. "Hello? Is this Crocker's Station?"

"Yes, this is Crocker's Station. What do you want with Tom Carey? He's in bed. This is Jim Crocker speaking. I'll take the message. Who's speaking, please?"

"This is central," came the faint answer. "At Garber City. It's about Mr. Carey's wife and baby. We've been trying to get you all day and all night. Hello? Do you understand?"

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Jim Crocker was listening; his heart was in his mouth.

"Yes," he said impatiently. "Go ahead. What's the matter with Tom Carey's wife?"

"The hotel management at Garber has been trying to get in touch with him all day yesterday," came the answer. "His wife started out into the desert about an hour before the storm broke; and the hotel people wanted him to be warned. They left word to keep ringing until we got him. Then—well, it's a whole lot worse now."

"What's worse?" Old Jim was getting worried.

"Well," came the answer, "it seems that somewhere about dark the chauffeur stopped the machine and the little girl slipped out and was blown away by the wind. Do you hear me? Yes. Blown away. It was dark and the mother ran after her. Neither came back. The driver waited for several hours, and then he started out for help. Came to a railroad and followed it to Skelly's Station. The telegraph operator sent in the news. Wait a minute, I'll get Bob Arnold, the sheepman. He knows all about it. He wants to speak to Tom Carey. Just wait."

By this time Jim Crocker's eyes were bulging.

"Hold on," he cried. "Hold the line, please. I'll get Mr. Carey."

Jim Crocker was a man of very little tact, and perhaps he was now too excited to use it. Next instant he was in Tom's room, shaking him by the shoulder. His words came in bunches.

"Wake up, Tom," he shouted, "wake up! Your wife and kid are out on the desert on foot. Wake up! Your little girl is lost in this hurricane—out on the desert—alone! Wake!"

But Tom was already out in the middle of the floor; his eyes wide with astonishment.

"Who—what?" he exclaimed. "My little girl! Where is she? Out in the desert—lost? Where? Who told you that——"

But Jim Crocker was leading him to the telephone; he pointed to the receiver. Tom Carey was wide awake by this time; but he could not believe his senses.

"Hello?" he called into the instrument.

"Is this Mr. Carey?" a voice asked. "Tom Carey? Oh, all right. Hold the line, please. We're getting Mr. Bob Arnold, the sheepman. Just a minute."

Tom Carey was thoroughly excited now; he wanted the details all at once. "Hello!" he almost shouted. "Hello you! Say! What the——"

"Hello!" came a clean-cut, masculine voice. "Is this you, Tom. Tom Carey? Oh, all right."

"Who's talking?"

"This is Bob Arnold," came the reply. "Bob Arnold, the sheepman. Now listen, Tom. And don't get excited."

And then the sheepman went on to tell him how it had all happened. He ended:

"And then they called me up, Tom. I'm supposed to know as much about this desert as anybody in the country. And I've been trying to get you for three hours. But don't lose your head now. Keep cool, and everything will come out all right. Now listen, Tom. Is my sheep-herder there? I mean Jean la Jeannette."

"That hot-headed little Frenchie?" came Tom's answer. "Yes. He's here. But——"

"No 'but' about it, Tom," said Bob Arnold. "Now wait a minute. Jean la Jeannette has got his old dog Rex, nasn't he? Well, here's what you do. First you get Jean la Jeannette. Then wait until daylight and start out fanwise with everybody at the station. But be sure and let that dog of Jean's take the lead. He knows more than all your men put together. Trust to Jean la Jeannette. If your wife and baby are

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in that part of the desert, the dog will find them. And, in the meantime, we'll be heading out from this side. We'll sweep the whole plain. This storm is dying down; and when it comes daylight, the sun will be a scorcher. We can't afford to make a mistake. We've got to find them before noon. But I'm sure we'll do it. Get Jean la Jeannette."

But there was no need for that. Jean was a light sleeper; the door of his room was ajar; he had heard his name, and he was there to find out the reason why.

"Ou la la!" he called from the doorway. "What's zee matter? Hey?"

And then he was pushed to the telephone. For a minute he listened.

"Oui, oui, monsieur," he said then. "So! But zat Rex she's gone. She's smell sometings 'bout sundown. So. And she's go out, and she's no come back. Funny, eh? Most like. *Oui, oui.* Hey? Zat Rex she's have awful long nose. Ou la la! Jean finds zat babe and no meestake. Ou la la! Zee storm she's breaking. Zat ees good. Eh, monsieur? In few minute she's daylight."

And then things began happening rapidly. Almost while the sheep-herder was talking, the storm died down, as suddenly as it had come up. And there is no calm quite as soothing as that following a sandstorm. Pierre le Sette had pulled on his clothes; everybody in the station was up, and talking excitedly. Jean la Jeannette was outside looking for his dog. Tom Carey had made a run for his big roadster; suddenly he reached into the back seat and pulled out a pair of field glasses. Then from the front of the building he scanned the newly lighted horizon for a moment. Then he shouted.

"Hey, hey, hey!" he called excitedly. "Look! Look! Holy Moses! Look! Over there! It's them, sure as shooting! The dog's got 'em. Here, Jean, look through these glasses."

But Jean la Jeannette had no time to look at anything. Next instant he was with Carey in the big car racing across the desert. Sure enough, there was a woman with a child in her arms—following Rex and a small band of sheep. With one jump, Tom Carey had the child and the mother in the machine. The woman was laughing and talking, and laughing again.

"And it was all that old dog's doings," she was saying excitedly. "He just knew everything. He was like a great big guardian. He was wonderful. Those sheep must have been driven into that coulee by the wind, and this morning he insisted on bringing them along with us. He seemed to know that they were lost. He came straight here. I never saw anything like him. Never!"

"Yes," said the little one, from her father's arms. "He come like a great big doggy. And after that I wasn't feered atall. We're goin' tuh keep him. Ain't we, daddy?"

But that was something that could not be; Tom Carey knew it. But Jean la Jeannette smiled. He was happy as usual.

Half an hour later there was a strange breakfast at the station, because Tom Carey, in his emotional way, had to celebrate. In fact, it was a sort of banquet. A banquet with an old dog as the guest of honor! Nothing would suit the big oil man but that the old dog must sit at the table. The little girl even tucked a napkin under his collar. It was a solemn moment for a wise old sheep dog. But Jean was there to make him mind his manners. Tom Carey bought the beefsteak, and Rex ate it. The crowd was there to give a toast. As Pierre le Sette said afterwards:

"It was worth it. That night cost me two thousand dollars. But when I came to settle with Tom, he laughed in my face. So I guess old Rex did me a favor as well as Tom Carey."

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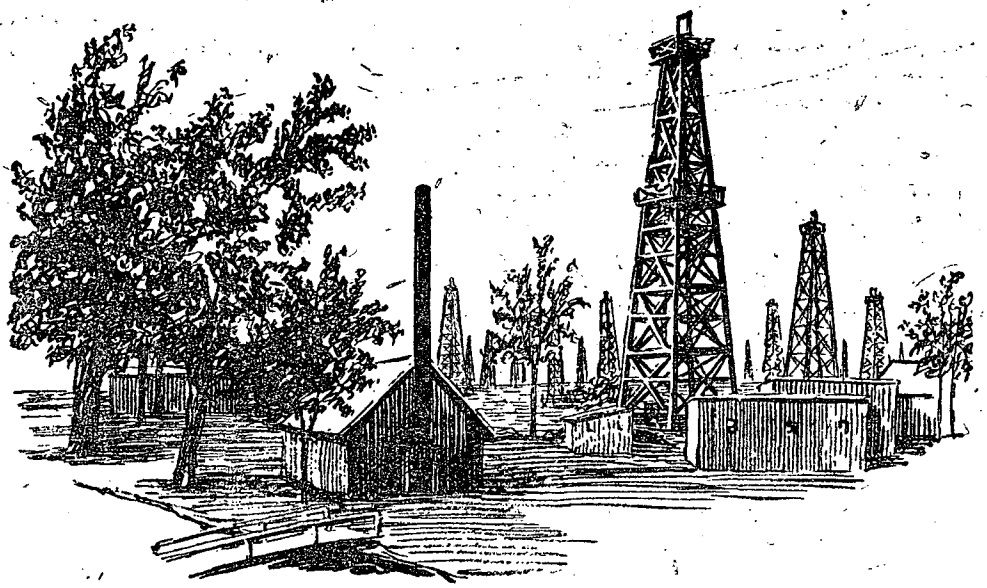

Pioneer Towns of the West

By Duane Clark

(Shawnee, Oklahoma)

LESS than ten miles south of the geographical center of the State of Oklahoma, on the north bank of the North Canadian River, lies Shawnee, claiming to be the fastest-growing city of the State. It is about forty-two miles southeast of the capital, and is connected with Oklahoma City by means of a splendid concrete highway.

Shawnee has the unique distinction of being founded by a woman, Mrs. H. G. Beard. This was in 1893, and her original cabin still stands, preserved by patriotic citizens as a historical monument. Shawnee is the metropolis of Pottawatomie County. This section is known as the Pott Country.

When Oklahoma became a State, in 1907, men from every part of the country came to settle in the new territory, and from that time on it has had a steady and rapid growth. In 1910 the first manufacturing industries came to Shawnee and the population increased accordingly.

One important reason for the popularity of Shawnee is the fact that it is so centrally located. Three railroads focus at this point; the Rock Island, the Santa Fe, and the Oklahoma City-Ada and Atoka. Both the Rock Island and Santa Fe maintain shops there. The Rock Island has the largest shops in the Southwest, employing over eleven hundred workers.

Another advantage which Shawnee has is its three important State highways. No. 3 east and west, passes through the Greater Seminole oil fields. No. 18 north and south, and No. 37, west, connect with the College Highway. Bus lines run daily from Shawnee to

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all main centers of the State, operating on frequent time schedules.

The population of Shawnee has nearly doubled in the past ten years, now being estimated at over thirty thousand, so that its claim of being the fastest-growing city in the State is well founded. There are many reasons given for Shawnee's rapid growth. It is believed that its bankers have been men of vision and constructive ability who have worked together in harmony with other business men to build a worth-while city. Strength in unity has been proved here conclusively, and when that unity has the best brains and endeavor back of it, success is the natural outcome.

Shawnee is located in a rich farming district. It is estimated that carload shipments from the county of Pottawatomie recently were as follows: Alfalfa and other hay crops, four hundred and thirty-seven cars; grains, six hundred and forty-six cars; potatoes, sixty-three cars; mill products, three thousand seven cars; fruit and vegetables, three hundred and seventy-five cars; cotton, fifty-five thousand bales; cotton seed products, five hundred fifteen cars; and live stock, one hundred and ninety-three cars. These figures are based on a single year, and each succeeding year promises an increase.

About three years ago, oil was discovered in the section in which Shawnee is located. That particular spot, twenty-two miles from the city, is known as the Seminole Pool. Oil developments extended to the south and southeast, coming within seven miles of the city limits, and are known as the Earlsboro Pool. The most productive of the developments is the South Maud Pool. The Independent Oil & Gas Co. brought in a well flowing twenty thousand barrels daily. It is said that the Shawnee Area is producing more high gravity oil than any other area in the United States.

While not all the oil speculators who came to the district were successful, many grew rich over night. Notwithstanding that the find of oil has been directly responsible for the past three years' increase in business and population, Shawnee does not consider that there has been any boom. Growth has been steady and continues so.

Shawnee has an Industrial Foundation Fund, which is contributed by the business men of the city. Whenever a new industry which apparently will benefit Shawnee lacks a financial basis to start it, the Foundation Fund comes to the rescue. It has proved to be an excellent idea and has worked out splendidly. This fund is in no sense a competitor of local banks, but operates as an aid to bankers in establishing industries that will eventually bring customers to the banks themselves, since Federal banking laws do not allow local banks to furnish capital at the outset.

When a new industry wishes to introduce itself to Shawnee, the Industrial Foundation carefully investigates the proposed industry and decides whether it will benefit the city. Then the head of the new industry must have sufficient ability and experience to carry on the project. After it has been decided that everything is in order, a third of the necessary capital is advanced. No credit is allowed for trade-marks, patents, or copyrights. The city also demands representation on the governing board and a system of auditing is installed. In this way the city becomes a partner in the new enterprise.

The Phillips Hotel was built upon this plan, the city furnishing a plot of land and the fund furnishing forty thousand dollars. In return, quarters for a permanent chamber of commerce were furnished on the mezzanine floor with rent free.

Shawnee has other hotels, eighteen churches, a fine hospital, and sanitarium, a Carnegie Library, and many beautiful

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dwellings of unusual design. There are three fine parks, a country club with a nine-hole golf course, besides two other golf courses, one privately owned and one owned by the Elks. Shawnee has also nearly three hundred retail establishments, twelve wholesale houses, twenty-three warehouses, two daily newspapers, six theaters, and twenty-seven manufacturing plants.

The Shawnee Milling Co. manufactures a complete line of flour, meal, alfalfa feeds, mill feeds, and poultry feeds, and is the largest plant of its kind west of the Mississippi River.

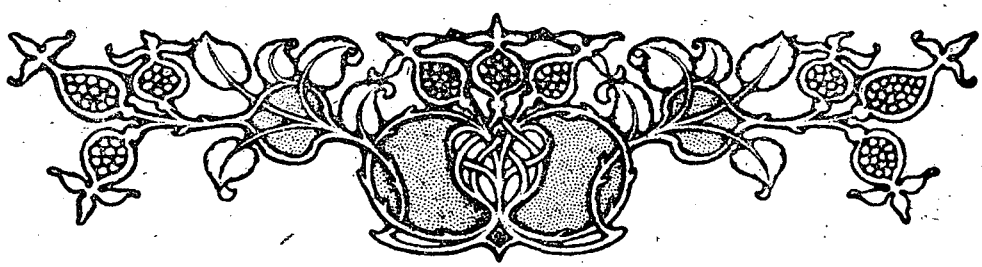
The Oklahoma Gas & Electric Co., the Oklahoma Natural Gas Co., the Shawnee Ice Co., the Southwestern Bell Telephone Co., the Western Union, and the Postal Telegraph companies, serve Shawnee. The water system is municipally owned, the water coming from ten driven wells.

A mayor and council is the present city government, but this system is likely to change to a city-manager form, which, it is believed, will benefit the city.

An outstanding institution of higher education in Oklahoma is the Oklahoma Baptist University, which has an enrollment of fifteen hundred pupils. Other educational facilities are St. Gregory's Catholic College, and St. Benedict's Academy, high school and junior high school, and also several grade schools.

Besides being one of the largest cotton-producing counties, the county in which Shawnee is located is yearly increasing its dairies. The poultry business is receiving much attention. As berries grow rather abundantly, farmers are taking up truck gardening. Another paying crop is pecan growing, an industry which is becoming more popular yearly.

Shawnee is very fortunate, not only in its oil resources, but in its agricultural possibilities, manufacturing concerns, and progressive businesses, inspired and pushed forward as they are by interested and far-seeing citizens.



WELCOME, VANCOUVER!

JUST off the southwest coast of British Columbia, and north of the State of Washington, lies the large island of Vancouver. At present this area is under Canadian rule, but, according to observations made over a period of twenty years, N. Dennison, of the meterological station on that island, believes that eventually the island will attach itself to the mainland of Washington.

Study made during this time has shown, says Dennison, that from November to June the island makes a decided easterly swing, while from June until November a marked westerly turn is taken. The tilting is explained by the presence of great depressions in the floor of the north Pacific Ocean.

In general, the motion of this uneasy island is southeasterly, in the direction of the United States. So Washington, prepare! While Eastern States are busy preparing receptions to transatlantic flyers, you may some day have the privilege of greeting a whole adventuresome island.

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Thunder Mountain Vengeance

By Howard J. Perry
Author of "Big Timber Stakes," etc.

CHAPTER I.

LOOKING FOR TROUBLE.

THE lines between Deputy Dan Landon's eyes deepened as he watched Sheriff Tom Graves going over the morning's mail. Only three letters remained unopened on the rough table between them, when Dan shifted his position and with a hopeless shrug slumped further into his chair.

"Looks like we didn't draw anything to-day, either, Tom," he muttered.

The sheriff glanced up, a twinkle in his alert eyes. Their brownness was only a shade deeper than the wrinkled tan of his weathered face. For a moment he studied the younger man speculatively.

"Dan," he said finally, "ain't you ever satisfied 'cept when you're neck-deep in trouble? Ev'ry deputy I got is enjoyin' hisself loafin' 'round, an' here you are frettin' an' stewin' 'cause there ain't a couple o' six-guns blazin' away at your carcass."

Dan pushed his Stetson back from his forehead and hunched still deeper in his chair, his square chin resting heavily on his thick chest.

"I got a letter from Jackson at Montreal, yesterday," he announced. "Said he wanted me to come back and go on Mountie patrol, running down booze peddlers up the Peace River."

Graves sat up. "You ain't thinkin' o' goin' are you?" A note of apprehension sounded in the question.

Dan squinted reflectively at the ceiling. "I ain't just made up my mind

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yet. It's pretty dog-gone dead in this timber country."

The older man leaned across the table and eyed him closely.

"Listen, Dan," he said, "your dad an' me battled that Mountie game together for many years. When he died he sent you down here, hopin' you'd settle down in the States an' forget this bloodhound business. I've tried to interest you in somethin' else beside dodgin' lead, but it don't seem to be much use. Can't you set your head on somethin' that'll do you some good? I kinda figgered maybe you'd stick 'round here with me till you learned somethin' 'bout the timber business an' then maybe you could pick up a section an' log it. A couple o' my deputies have done that an' they're makin' good."

Dan grinned across at the other. "Gosh, Tom, you wouldn't sentence me to that kind of a life, would you?"

"Why not?" the sheriff demanded sharply. "If I was a mite younger I wouldn't be here drawin' a salary from the county. There's money in timber, you know."

"But, criminy, it's a dead life," the younger man protested. "Here I've been a deputy for you for six months and there ain't been enough action in all that time to keep a one-legged blind man busy ten minutes. Now that Peace River job, Tom"—his eyes lit eagerly—"that ought to prove exciting. Kind of wild up there, ain't it? You've been there."

The sheriff's mouth lowered in disgust. "Gosh, kid! Course it's wild. But what you always want wildness for? You'll get bumped off some of these days. The chances are all against you. That's why your dad wanted you out of it."

He heaved a deep sigh and returned to his unopened mail. "But, then, you're a chip off the old block. Just like he was. Always seekin' trouble. You know, Dan, I kinda figgered you'd settle down an'—an' maybe you'd get married."

Dan sat up with a snort. "Not on your cockeyed life!" he cried. He half rose from his chair. "If you've got any notion of getting me in that sort of a fix, I'm leaving for the North right now."

Graves paused in the act of opening a letter and grinned at the boy. "Calm down, son, calm down," he soothed. "I just said what I hoped, an' what I knew your dad would like. There ain't much chance for you, I'll admit. One would think a woman was a ton of dynamite with a lighted fuse, the way you dodge 'em."

He scanned the opened letter. "Here's a woman now, writin' in for us to try an' find her husband. Want the job?"

"No! Give it to Chuck. He likes to wait on grass widows." Dan had settled back in his chair, his eyes on the older man.

Graves picked up the next envelope and opened it. He read the inclosed message through, and then reread it. All the time he stroked his chin meditatively, his brown eyes slowly welling with anger.

"Well, the sneakin', insinuatin' rat!" he burst out vehemently.

Dan sat up. His steel-blue eyes glittered hopefully. "Sounds promising, Tom. Spill it!"

"By gosh, it is promisin'!" the sheriff growled. "It's from that fellow, Bart Thompson, who's just started taking out that timber on Thunder Mountain. He's gettin' nasty."

"How come?" Dan asked. "Who is this guy Thompson, anyway?"

"That's right, you weren't here when they had that holdup about a month ago. You were up the river after that Indian. Well, Thompson sent word down an' hollered for help. Seems that a guy stuck up their pay roll an' took part of it. 'Bout a thousand dollars. I sent a couple o' the boys up, but they couldn't

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discover much. Thompson was grouchy, an' wouldn't help. It sounded rather queer, anyhow. I never heard of a stick-up who'd leave anything if he got his hands on it."

Dan's momentary interest had ebbed. "Shucks, Tom, I thought you had something hot," he grumbled.

"Wait a minute, son, maybe this'll be hot enough yet. Thompson says here they're bringin' in another pay roll, an' he wants me to send up some men to be on hand, an' then listen to what he says." The sheriff picked up the letter and read:

"—and if you can't haul a couple of your deputies away from their pool game long enough to give us some help, I'm quite certain the voters of this section can materially aid in picking a more efficient sheriff at the fall election."

Tom Graves looked up, his round face flushed with anger. "Now what do you think of that for gall, Dan? You'd think that guy was runnin' this county."

"Well," laughed Dan, "it looks like you stood a good chance to lose three or four votes, Tom."

"Three or four!" exploded the other. "I wish there was only three or four voters up there. Then I'd tell this crook to chase his own holdups. But there's a lot of people in that section, an' he's cussed enough to spend a little money buyin' votes to beat me."

"You don't seem to like Thompson, I take it," said Dan, still laughing.

"You bet I don't like him! He used to hang 'round here, gamblin' an' causin' trouble, an' a couple o' times I threatened to run him outa town. Then he disappeared for a while, an' the first thing I knew he started loggin' that timber. How he ever got hold of that beautiful stand of stuff I don't know, but he did, an' now he's loggin' it."

"Well, what are you going to do about it? Do you want me to go up?"

The sheriff brightened. "I wish you would, Dan. I'd like to know what's goin' on up in that country. Take two of the boys with you an' start right away."

Dan looked at the older man in hurt surprise. "Tom, you don't mean to tell me you think it takes three deputies to investigate that place? Why, there hasn't been enough trouble around here for one man to watch! I'll take a ride up there this afternoon by myself. It would be a shame to interrupt the boys for a simple little thing like this." He got up and started for the door.

"Hey, wait a minute!" the sheriff called after him. "Don't get so all-fired premature. I'll admit this place has been rather quiet since you've been here, but it's a big county, an' you don't know that Thunder Mountain country, an' you don't know Bart Thompson. That whole gang of loggers he's got with him are a bad bunch, an' any one from this office is just like so much poison to them. You take some one with you. That's a queer section up there."

Dan turned impatiently. "Tom, I believe you're getting old. If I thought it would take more than a kid to do this, I'd quit and accept Jackson's offer. I ain't so certain that I won't, anyway. But if anything does happen that I can't handle, I'll send for you." He whirled and went out.

For a long time Tom Graves stared at the open doorway. Then he reached for his pipe and lit it. "Just like his old dad," he muttered. "Derned if I don't wish he could stir up some excitement! It might be good for him."

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGER IN THE NIGHT.

A HALF hour later Dan rode off toward the timbered mountains in the west. It was the first time he had ever gone into this part of the county. But the stable boy had given him a general idea of the location of Thunder Mountain. It was about thirty miles distant,

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and he judged he could make it before dark.

But as he penetrated deeper into the mountains and the trail became steeper, he was forced to slow his mount to a walk. On all sides the giant firs towered above him, and as these increased in size and height, he unconsciously found himself admiring their beauty and figuring on the possible amount of lumber in each.

"Dog-gone it, horse," he said, addressing the animal beneath him, "this sure is some stand." Then he laughed. "By gosh, I'll be getting this timber bug myself if I ain't careful!"

Presently the lengthening shadows warned him that daylight would soon be gone. The trail grew more rugged and the walls of silent trees gave him no indication of his whereabouts. The camp he was seeking might be just a few miles farther on, or it might be ten. He had forgotten to reckon his speed, but he estimated that he had gone about twenty or twenty-five miles.

In another hour darkness enveloped him, and Dan stopped trying to distinguish the way. He gave the horse his head and settled resignedly into his saddle. There was no use worrying. He would have to leave it to his mount. He felt rather than saw the black sides of the canyon pressing closer, and knew that his course was getting steeper. From out of the darkness below came the murmur of rushing water. Overhead a night hawk screamed as it careened through the moonless sky.

After he had ridden for what he thought was another five miles, he reined up his horse. The timber broke away above him and he squinted at the familiar stars of the Big Dipper. At the first glance he knew he was heading southwest, and he remembered that the stable boy had told him Thunder Mountain lay due west. During the afternoon he had noted many trails branching off the main one, and in the darkness his horse must have swung off on one similar to those.

Just ahead he heard the trickle of water, and dismounting, he moved forward, leading his horse. After a few feet he came upon a small stream that crossed the trail and tumbled down into the canyon below. His mount displayed his satisfaction at the discovery by immediately sinking his nose into the pool that had formed in the trail. Dan climbed up the bank a few feet and also quenched his thirst.

As he started to return to his horse the faint sound of voices came to him from above in the direction he had been riding. Straining his ears, he tried to catch their words, but they stopped suddenly, and he was debating whether or not he had been mistaken when there came the loud beat of horse's feet. Some one was coming down the trail at a breakneck pace.

Realizing the narrowness at this point, Dan leaped toward his horse to pull it aside, but he found he was a second too late. The oncoming rider plunged out of the darkness. There was the flash of sparks as the steel shoes of the stranger's horse rasped on the rocks. A collision loomed inevitable, but the animal was pulled quickly to one side. Yet this movement was a little too sudden. Almost before Dan became aware that the collision was to be avoided, the newcomer's mount lost its footing and pitched sideways, plunging headlong into the canyon beneath.

Dan gasped as he recalled the steepness of the drop, but the next moment he heard the horse thrashing around in the blackness not far below. Apparently the heavy growth of timber had checked its fall.

Scrambling down, Dan came upon the frightened mount. It had risen to its feet and stood trembling violently. In the darkness Dan made out the empty saddle. Reaching for a match, he struck it and held it above his head.

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As the faint glow from this penetrated the gloom, he perceived a slender, boyish figure lying face upward in a tangle of brush a few feet away. Peering closer, he started back involuntarily, for he discovered that the face he was looking into was that of a girl, and in the momentary glow before the match went out he noted that her eyes were tightly closed and her cheeks were a pasty white.

Hurrying forward, he lifted her in his arms and bore her back up to the pool. Laying her on a level spot, he rushed to his saddlebag and returned with his flash light. Snapping it on, he placed it where it lighted up her face. Then he took out his handkerchief and dipped it in the water. As he applied it to her temples, he saw with relief that there were no lacerations about her head. Perhaps she was only stunned.

Presently a faint flush stole into her cheeks, and a moment later her eyes opened. Blankly she stared at him, then an expression of mixed perplexity and surprise swept her countenance.

Dan smiled uncertainly down at her. "Feeling better?" he asked to cover his embarrassment.

She raised her hand and pushed back the dampened hair from her forehead. "Yes—yes, I—I guess I'm all right. Did—did Blackie throw me?"

"If Blackie's your horse, he'll have to take the blame for your spill. But it wasn't his fault. You were coming pretty fast, and my brute was in the middle of this narrow path."

She sat up quickly, her eyes widening with fear. "Is he hurt?" she cried. "Did Blackie get hurt?" Anxiously she searched the margin of light.

"No, I don't think so," Dan assured her. "He's down in the canyon a little ways, and he was standing on all fours when I picked you up." He got to his feet. "I'll bring him right up and we'll see."

Returning a moment later with the unhurt Blackie, Dan found the girl had already risen.

"I guess he's all right," he stated, then added shyly, "but what about yourself? Are you injured in any way?"

"No, just a little bruised. That's all," she replied.

"Well, you're both lucky. You were coming at a good clip for such a dark night on this mountainside."

"Yes, I was going quite fast," she admitted as she stroked Blackie's head. "But I often ride alone at night, and I hardly expected to meet any one on the trail at this time."

Dan darted her a quick look. Her eyes were turned frankly upon him, yet in their depths he thought he detected a fleeting shadow of equivocation. Had he actually heard those voices? If so, then she was not riding alone before the accident. Suddenly confusion seized him, as though she were aware of his thoughts.

"I—I didn't expect to be here at this time of night, either," he explained hurriedly. "I'm trying to get to Thompson's logging camp on Thunder Mountain, but I think I've got off the right track."

"Yes, you have," she said. "In the dark you turned to the left instead of continuing on up the river. You'll have to go back about three miles and then turn to the left when you come to the river. You can't miss it when you know about it, because it roars through the canyon at that place."

"Thanks," said Dan, reaching for his flash light.

"I think I should say 'Thanks' to you," she laughed. "You did me a big service."

"Shucks, that was nothing," he replied. "My horse was really to blame."

"Well, I guess we're none the worse for the incident, but perhaps I should introduce myself. I'm Cherrie Lane. I live up the Singing River Valley."

"I'm sure glad to know you," mum-

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bled Dan. "I'm Dan Landon, deputy sheriff of Yocunda County."

With a sharp intake of breath, the girl stiffened. Turning, she put her foot in the stirrup and vaulted into the saddle.

"I believe I've heard of Dan Landon," she said. Her voice carried a sudden tightness. "You're the Dan Landon who used to be with the Mounted Police, are you not?"

He grinned sheepishly. "I guess I'm the one. But how did you happen to know?"

She assumed almost a haughty pose as she sat in her saddle looking down at him. "In this country, everything is known. One can't keep anything to one's self," she retorted, and added icily. "And I presume you are up here to get your man."

Dan stared at her, perplexed. The chill in her words was unmistakable. He started to reply, but at the same instant she wheeled her horse. The big black reared on his hind legs and spun around, his forefeet coming down on the trail again. The move was executed as only a clever equestrian could possibly do it.

"Good night, sheriff," she said coldly as she tilted her body forward in the saddle. And before Dan could answer, the big horse responded to her movement and leaped away into the darkness of the night.

Dan stood for a moment, scratching his head. Then he returned to his own horse. "Gosh," he muttered aloud, "women are queer. What in thunder did I do to make her act so uppish all of a sudden?"

He mounted and started back down the trail over which he had come, immersed in his thoughts. A strange and unaccountable feeling assailed him. He found himself reviewing in every detail his meeting with the girl, and especially did his thoughts linger on that moment when he carried her in his arms back up from the canyon. Then they dwelt on her sudden and inexplicable coolness when she learned who he was. Well, Tom Graves had warned him that this was a pretty queer country. But instead of being alarmed, Dan laughed buoyantly. At last something gave promise of proving exciting.

His horse took the back trail at a lope, and presently Dan heard the roar of the river ahead. Turning his flash light on the ground, he soon came upon the forks where he had taken the wrong route. As he started up the river he became aware that his horse was continually throwing both ears back as though listening to something behind him.

"Say, old fellow," he said, "you're acting mighty like some one is following us." He pulled the animal to a walk and waited for some sound, but only the river below broke the stillness of the night. "Dog-gone! If I didn't know horses, I'd say you were loco, but the way you're acting, I'll bet you've got a reason." He put his spurs to the animal. "Well, let's go. If anybody's on our trail this time of night, they'll have to step. We're hitting for Thunder Mountain."

CHAPTER III.

SLOWFOOT SOUNDS A WARNING.

AFTER a half hour's hard riding, the odor of new-cut timber came to Dan's nostrils, and he knew he was nearing the site of a logging operation. The trail dropped down, and a few moments later a light showed against the black base of a mountain across the valley. As he drew nearer, he made out the faint outline of a logging camp.

The light which he saw came from a large building set off from the long rows of bunk houses. This was the camp's social center, he supposed, and the nightly gathering place of the men. On approaching it, the sound of raucous voices and wild shouts came to his ears.

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Evidently the men were having an especially good time.

Dismounting, Dan moved toward the entrance, which was thrown open, and through which he could see the roughly clad figures of a number of men milling about in the center of the room. They were laughing and talking as though intent on some enjoyable game. Then, above the shouts, came the pleading voice of one man.

Pausing in the doorway, Dan watched the scene before him. The air was thick with smoke, and foul with the odor of bad liquor. More than twenty loggers stood against the wall or on tables, all intent on five of their companions, who were clustered about the diminutive figure of a sixth, who lay on the floor.

For a moment Dan could not ascertain what they were doing, but soon he discovered that the five were engaged in tying the hands and feet of the little one; and it was he whose voice Dan had heard pleading with them to stop.

"Aw, fellows!" he cried. "Lay offn me. Don't throw me in the river tonight. I'll die, sure as fate. That ice water'll kill me."

A burst of laughter from his assailants greeted this entreaty.

"Listen to him!" one of them yelled. "Just as if one bullcook more or less matters! Come on, let's be sure he can't get loose."

"Yeah," affirmed another. "Bullcooks live too long, anyway. They ought all to be drowned."

By this time they had trussed the little fellow securely and stood up to view their job. Dan was able to get a better view of him as they did so. Instantly he was struck by the misery etched on his wrinkled face. He glanced at the others and saw that they were for the most part in the last stages of intoxication. Was it possible that they actually intended to throw the poor little old man into the river? As if in answer to his unspoken question, they reached down and picked him up and turned toward the door.

"All right, men," one called to the others in the room. "C'mon an' watch us give 'im a bath."

There was a sudden movement near the door, then every one stopped and looked in that direction. For the first time the loggers became aware of Dan's powerful form framed in the doorway. No one spoke. The men carrying the bullcook bent their curious eyes sullenly on him.

Dan's glance coolly swept the group. He knew that the star on his shirt informed them who he was.

"Howdy, men," he said, his voice firm. "I hope I'm not breaking up your party, but I see you must have been expecting me."

One logger, the largest in the group, released his grip on the bullcook's leg and stepped forward.

"What d'you mean, expectin' you?" he growled. "We don't invite or expect any deputies up here."

"That's funny," said Dan. "I kinda figured you were. I see you got your bullcook all ready for me. I was looking for him."

The logger looked at the bullcook and then back at Dan. "What d'you want 'im for? We was just goin' to give 'im a dip. You can have 'im after we're done with 'im."

"Thanks, but I can't wait," Dan replied, his eyes on the logger's face. "I'll take him now."

He stepped forward, drawing a knife from his pocket. Inwardly he was tense. He knew the first waver on his part would spell defeat for his plan. Quickly he cut the little fellow's bonds and yanked him to his feet. The bullcook's face registered a mixture of relief, surprise and fear.

"Come on," said Dan gruffly. "You're going with me." As he strode toward the door he could feel the eyes of the loggers on him. Without a backward

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glance, he led the bullcook out. Once covered by the darkness, he quickened his pace toward his horse. Behind him he heard a burst of laughter.

"That's a good one on you, 'Buck,'" some one taunted. "You sure let him bluff you."

A great string of curses, evidently from the one named Buck, was the only answer.

Taking the reins of his horse, Dan released his grip on the bullcook. The little fellow squinted up at him fearfully. "Say, what's the idea? What've I done? What you arrestin' me for?"

Dan laughed. "Wouldn't you rather be arrested than thrown into the river?"

The bullcook flung an eloquent glance back over his shoulder at the building they had just quitted. "You're darn tootin' I would," he exclaimed. "But what've you got on me? What do you want me for?"

"I don't want you. Not to arrest, anyway," Dan declared.

The other's eyes widened wonderingly. Then he comprehended the situation and grinned broadly, revealing his almost toothless gums. The two had started away, but he stopped. "Say," he ejaculated, wanting to make certain, "d'you mean to tell me you just wanted to save me from that duckin'?"

Dan nodded. "I couldn't let them give you a bath this time of night," he said with mock seriousness.

"Well, by gosh! I ain't never had much use for the law, but you sure treated me white and square just now. It's the first time in a long time any one ever took my part. Those timber beasts have been badgerin' me for a month. To-night they got extra drunk an' I knew I was in for trouble. Say, who are you, anyway? What's your name?"

"I'm Dan Landon."

"So you're that Mountie guy Sheriff Graves took on some time ago, eh?"

"That's me," replied Dan. Evidently these people kept a pretty good check on what was going on in Graves' office.

"Well, I'm 'Slowfoot' Regan, bullcook of this outfit," the other announced. He stuck out his bony hand. "Shake, Dan, and right now let me say if you want a bullcook for a friend, I'm the guy."

Dan shook the proffered hand warmly. "I'm dog-gone glad to have you for a friend, Slowfoot," he said. "Judging from the reception I got, I'll need one."

"Bein' a deputy, you didn't expect anything better, did you?" Slowfoot asked. "By the way, what you doin' up here?"

"Before I answer that, can you tell me where I can sleep to-night?"

"I've got a shack all to myself," said the other. "And there's an extra bunk in it. You're more'n welcome to it, if you don't object to bunkin' with a bullcook."

"Object?" queried Dan, then added characteristically, "Why, Slowfoot, I'd consider it an honor."

The diminutive bullcook beamed. "Son, I repeat, you're a regular fellow. After bein' chambermaid to this gang of timber beasts an' treated worse'n a mangy dog, it sure makes me feel good to be dealt with like a man once more."

The bullcook's appreciation was so genuine that Dan felt a deep sense of compassion for him. "All right, Slowfoot," he said. "Let's go over to your shack and I'll tell you why I'm up here."

Slowfoot led him down to a small bunk house at the far end of the camp. There, while the older man puffed at an aged corncob with philosophic serenity, Dan told him his mission to Thunder Mountain. When he concluded, the other continued to smoke in silence, his beady eyes fixed on the pale-blue cloud above him. Finally he removed his pipe and pointed the stem at Dan.

"Listen, son," he said, "if I was you I'd ride right back to town and have nothin' to do with Thompson an' this here outfit. The only thing you're likely

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to get in this part of the country is a bullet in your hide."

"How come, Slowfoot?" Dan asked, "Don't you think there's really been a holdup? What is Thompson's game?"

"Oh, there's been a holdup, all right. Fact is, Thompson didn't tell Graves half of it. I guess he didn't call for help until he had to. He had some trouble when he started in here. The work was slowed up by strange accidents. Then the office was robbed of cash a couple of times before this last one."

Here Slowfoot hitched his chair closer to Dan's and lowered his voice. "But what I want to get across to you is that Bart Thompson ain't a man to be trusted. Don't ask me why, 'cause I can't say, but I got a hunch. An' these loggers he's got ain't much better. That is, 'bout seven of 'em, which he brought up here with him an' who run the camp. That was some of 'em that tried to put me in the river to-night. They're hard-boiled an' won't stop at nothin'."

"But Thompson's got a real good bunch of timber here, hasn't he?" asked Dan. Somehow he felt that the little fellow was not exaggerating.

"You bet he has!" the other ejaculated. "The best stand in this part of the county. But how did he get it, an' where'd he get the money to run the camp? That's what I'd like to know. An he's high-ballin' this outfit as if he only had one season to get the stuff out in."

"Well," said Dan, "I'm up here now, and I'm going to do what I came up for. I'm going to investigate and try to solve those robberies."

"I might 'a' knowed you was the kind that wouldn't quit," the other muttered, knocking the ashes from his pipe, "but take a tip from me. Don't trust any one 'round here, an' remember, these fellows carry concealed weapons, an' they'd just as soon shoot you in the back."

"I'll be careful," Dan replied. "Suppose we hit the hay now. I'll see Thompson in the morning."

"All right, son. Remember, I'll do all I can to help you, but it's gotta be done carefullike. If Thompson thought I was tellin' you these things, I'd be goin' down the river, an' not swimmin'." He shuffled across the room and extinguished the lamp. "You'll find that bunk hard, but it's clean."

Dan had pulled off his boots and outer clothing and was between the blankets. "It's a darn good bed, Slowfoot. Good night."

A few minutes later the bullcook's heavy breathing indicated that he was already asleep. Dan lay for some time listening to the sough of the night wind in the tops of the big firs outside. It looked as if there might be some excitement for him, after all, he concluded, reviewing the events of the day. Almost involuntarily, his thoughts kept recurring to Cherrie Lane and the incident of his meeting with her. He hoped that he might find some excuse to visit the Singing River Valley.

CHAPTER IV.

A COLD WELCOME.

THE faint rays of false dawn were piercing the smudged windows of the shack when Slowfoot's alarm clock jangled harshly, and the old man, clad in his red underwear, crawled laboriously from his bed.

Dan awoke with a start. "What's the matter?" he asked. "It ain't morning yet, is it?"

Slowfoot blinked sleepily at him. "It will be, pronto," he said. "I've got to haul some wood in for the cook an' then wake these roughnecks. You take it easy till the men go to the woods, then I'll arrange for your breakfast."

He shuffled out. Dan lay hearing the cawing of the crows and the clatter of pans in the cook shack. He had about dropped off to sleep again when the loud

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clang of the triangle split the morning air. The bullcook was rousing the men.

The beat of the iron gathered speed with a tempo that would have done credit to a master composer, and Dan could almost hear in the allegro movement the little fellow's joy in this one moment of the day when he held undeniable power over the men. With a series of staccato beats, he ended abruptly, the echoes dying away against the distant forest slopes.

Almost immediately lusty grunts and the noisy rattling of wash pans, together with good-natured bantering, sounded from all parts of the camp, followed by the clumping of calked boots as the men descended on the cook shack. Dan responded with an inward thrill, and for a moment he envied these men and the rugged life they led.

In the silence that ensued he fell asleep again, and it was only when he felt Slowfoot shaking him that he awakened.

"C'mon, son," the bullcook greeted cheerily. "The gang've gone to the woods. The cook'll give you breakfast, an' then you can have a visit with Bart. He'll be stickin' around the commissary an' office all morning."

It was while he was eating alone at the long oilcloth-covered table, and noted the occasional sullen glances flung at him by the cook, that the thought occurred to Dan that Slowfoot might have had a reason for urging him to remain in bed until after the men had gone.

When he left the cook shack, he approached the bullcook, who was busy splitting wood behind the building.

"You weren't afraid I'd spoil the appetite of the loggers by eating with them, were you, Slowfoot?" he asked.

The little fellow grinned guiltily. "Well, I figgered they wouldn't be so very glad to see you, an' I didn't want you to start any more trouble with them until after you had seen Bart." He jerked his head in the direction of the commissary. "He's over there now. Better go an' see 'im. I'll be around here if you want any information."

"Thanks," said Dan, starting away, "I may need it."

Shortly afterward, when he strode into the commissary, Dan observed a slender, well-muscled man of youthful appearance sitting at a rough table at the far end of the room. Unquestionably, this was Thompson, and in his first appraising glance, Dan was struck by the length of the sideburns that dropped several inches to his blue-black jaws, and the pointed nose that extended down over his sensuous mouth.

Thompson looked up coolly as the deputy entered. "Hello, Landon! I'm glad you're looking well this morning." His voice carried a subtle sarcasm that did not escape Dan.

"Did you expect an invalid?" the latter inquired.

"I wouldn't have been a bit surprised, after I heard of your sociable attitude toward my men last night."

Dan smiled. Apparently Thompson had already learned the details of the little scene of the previous evening. "I guess I did spoil their bathing party," he admitted. "But I couldn't very well let them throw that poor bullcook into the river. Especially with his hands and feet tied."

The hardness with which they had first greeted Dan never left the other's eyes. "Fortunately, your bluff worked," he remarked dryly. "But it might not the second time. They're unaccustomed to any interference from strangers, especially deputy sheriffs."

"So I understand," Dan retorted. Already he felt a growing annoyance at Thompson's awkward effort at hidden insolence. He stepped forward toward a chair, but as he did so, a movement at the other side of the room caught his attention. At a high desk he perceived for the first time a slim, dapper indi-

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vidual, with oily hair and olive skin, whose bullet-shaped head was bent over his work.

"Sheriff Graves sent me up here," said the deputy, seating himself, and bringing his eyes back to Thompson. "I understand you want some one to investigate a holdup you've had."

"Under ordinary conditions, I'd investigate my own holdups," the timber owner replied tersely. "But there's something queer about this one."

"What did this fellow act like, and did you get a good look at him?" asked Dan, putting aside his dislike for the man before him and coming to the point of the interview.

The corners of Thompson's mouth curled with a faint sneer. "He acted like a dang good gunman," he snapped. "Walked in here when I was alone. I made a move for my gun, but he was quicker'n lightning. As for looks, I couldn't see his face. It was covered to the eyes with a handkerchief, and he had a cap pulled over his forehead. But I saw he was a short, slender chap."

"About the size of—of"—Dan glanced around—"of your—er—bookkeeper, there?" he suggested, nodding toward the small man sitting across the room.

The latter was about to place a letter file on the shelf above him when Dan spoke. At the deputy's words, he started so suddenly that a file slipped from his hand and crashed to the floor, spilling the contents. Climbing down from his stool, he began nervously gathering up the strewn papers.

Dan watched the fellow's discomfiture curiously, and waited for Thompson to comment on it, but he completely ignored the incident.

"Yeah," he said. "About the size of Pete Marino, there."

"And you say he passed up a lot of cash and only took a thousand dollars?" Dan went on.

"He couldn't have overlooked it, because it was all in the cash box. He just counted out a thousand and left the rest." Evidently Thompson saw the incredulity on the deputy's face. "Yeah, I know it sounds unbelievable, but that's the straight of it."

"It sure does sound odd," replied Dan, going over the unusual details in his mind. "But stranger things have been known to happen, I guess. And you think he's likely to make another call?"

"In view of the things that have occurred around here, I do," Thompson declared. "That's why I sent for some one from your office. To-morrow is pay day. The men insist on cash. Usually we bring the money in about noon, and that's what every one thinks we'll do to-morrow. But instead, I'm having it come in late to-night. And all I want you to do is to be here about midnight, when the men come in, and guard the money until morning."

Dan frowned and jerked his head toward the bookkeeper. "Aren't you afraid your plan will leak out?" he asked warningly.

"Oh, Pete's all right," the other assured him. "He's been with me since the camp opened. And you're the only other person who knows about it except the two men who went in to-day for the pay roll."

Dan got to his feet. "Well, I guess that's all. I'll be around to-night." He started for the door.

"Just a moment, Landon," Thompson called after him. "Better stay clear of the men. You didn't make any friends last night."

"Thanks, Thompson," Dan replied curtly. "But I have always found that I can take care of myself." He continued toward the door and hurried out. The other's insolent arrogance had nettled him, and he wanted to get out of his presence as soon as he could.

Pausing for a moment outside the commissary, he became aware of the fig-

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ure of a man slinking away from the entrance. Looking closely, he saw it was an aged Indian, with stooped shoulders and long black hair hanging about his coppery, seamed face. Curiously Dan followed him with his eyes, and was surprised to note the acceleration of his speed as he ducked in between two bunk houses on the other side of the camp.

Deciding that he had better look after his horse, Dan walked toward the stable. Graves had been right, after all. Thunder Mountain was proving itself to be far from drab and uninteresting. While he could not lay his fingers on anything definite, certainly there was an undercurrent of evasion which Dan felt was prophetic of hidden motives. He reasoned that there was more than accidental significance in Pete Marino's recent confusion. Regardless of Thompson's assurance to the contrary, Dan decided that in Pete he had a clew which he was going to follow up.

Passing the cook shack, he perceived Slowfoot sitting on the chopping block, his corncob hanging from the corner of his mouth, and his beady eyes fixed on him. Dan walked over.

"Well," the little fellow inquired, squinting up, "how'd you get along with the boss of Thunder Mountain?"

Dan grinned. "Just about as well as you figured I would." The old bullcook could not be fooled, and Dan judged him to be a lot keener than the rest of the loggers in the camp.

"An' who's goin' to catch the holdup?" Slowfoot asked, his merriment showing in the twinkle in his eyes.

"Thompson thinks he is," Dan replied. "But maybe he'll condescend to let me take him back to town."

The old man's toothless grin was wide. "Yep, Thompson was runnin' true to form. You must 'a' got along fine."

"By the way, Slowfoot," said Dan seriously, "who's that fellow Pete Marino?"

"An' you met up with him, too?" the other asked. "Well, that greasy little runt has been 'round here since Thompson started operations. I don't know why the boss puts up with him, but he sure does."

"And is there an old Indian working in this camp?" was Dan's next question.

"Nope. Not that I know of." Slowfoot looked puzzled for a moment, then his face lit up. "Oh, I know! You must 'a' seen old 'Indian Joe.' He hangs around beggin' scraps offn the cook. He lives in the Singing River Valley."

"Singing River Valley," Dan repeated thoughtfully. "That's on the other side of Thunder Mountain, isn't it?" He indicated the evergreen slopes of the big mountain rising above them. "Can one ride over there from here?"

"Say," said Slowfoot, his face puckering inquisitively, "you're gettin' doggone curious askin' so many questions."

Dan nodded. "Sure I'm getting curious! But I'm becoming interested in this affair, and I'm going to stick around and clear up some things even if it's just to satisfy my own curiosity. Do you suppose you could ride over into Singing River Valley and back before dark?"

"I guess maybe you could, if you pushed right along. What you goin' over there for? Goin' to look for that Indian?"

"Maybe," said Dan absently. The mere mention of the valley awoke his recollection of the previous night on the trail. He felt the color mounting to his cheeks. "Maybe I'll do that, Slowfoot," he said, starting away. "I'll see you when I get back."

The bullcook studied him closely. "Gosh, now you're actin' queer, too. I'm goin' to move outa this camp before I get that way."

"Don't go until I'm through here," Dan laughed. "I may need you yet." He hurried toward the stable, where he saddled his horse and rode away.

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CHAPTER V.

DAN GETS A SURPRISE.

WHEN Dan Landon went up the trail through the giant timber mantling the base of Thunder Mountain, he tried to tell himself he was just looking around to get an idea of the country, for even to his most inward self he found it difficult to admit that, for the first time in his life, he had crossed paths with a woman whose image persisted in his thoughts. But as he wound along amid the big firs, the incident of the night before with Cherrie Lane was constantly before him. He kept reviewing in detail the strange encounter with this mountain girl, and he searched vainly for some explanation of her odd actions.

After riding for an hour, he saw before him a canyon cutting through the mountain and discovered a trail leading up through this. It bore signs of heavy travel, and he turned his horse into it. As he progressed, he was impressed by the beauty of the timber. Thompson had certainly secured a marvelous stand. Dan felt he would be willing to turn logger if he could own such trees.

He was deep in his reflections when his horse started suddenly and threw his ears forward. At the same instant a guttural "Stop!" came from the slope above him. Dan pulled up and jerked around in his saddle, his hand lowering to his gun and his eyes sweeping the shadows of the thick timber.

A slight movement beside a large tree caught his attention. Not more than thirty feet distant was the old Indian he had seen outside the commissary that morning. He stood erect now, and Dan's hand paused. The Indian's wrinkled face was pressed against the stock of a rifle that was leveled directly on him.

The old fellow took a step forward and spoke in a throaty voice: "You go back!" The command was decisive.

Dan studied him closely. There was no doubt as to the other's seriousness. But what was he up to? Was he crazy, or did he have some reason for not wanting any one to go up the trail? Dan puzzled over this as he removed his hand from the region of his gun. It would not pay to take that kind of a chance. The old fellow might shoot. Yet he felt the rancor of resentment stirring within him. He had no intention of returning at that moment or at any one's command.

Dan pressed his spur into the flank of his horse, and the animal started to circle slowly. Apparently convinced that the deputy was turning back, the Indian lowered his rifle, but the next moment Dan lurched from his saddle, striking the ground on the opposite side of his horse. As he did so, he whipped out his gun. Instantly the Indian's rifle snapped again into position. But it flew from the man's hands and he stumbled backward as a loud report roared up the trail.

Dan whirled in the direction of the shot. In the trail stood a black horse, and astride it sat Cherrie Lane, a revolver in her hand. Her black eyes were resting gravely on him.

"That was almost a fatal move of yours," she said accusingly. "If you knew what a crack shot Indian Joe is, you wouldn't have taken such a foolish chance." She turned on the Indian and spoke sharply. "Joe, I'll take care of this. You go back. Don't worry about your gun. I'll get you another."

The man looked at her in sullen inquiry for a moment, then he turned and slipped away into the timber. As she thrust her gun into the holster at her side, she gave her attention again to Dan.

"Joe's a little queer," she said, her voice softening slightly. "He doesn't like strangers, and always thinks they're up here to steal something."

Dan also replaced his gun. "I'm much obliged to you for your timely appear-

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ance," he said awkwardly. "And I might remark that you handled that shooting iron quite easylike."

The girl flushed. "That was a lucky shot. I only intended to attract his attention, but I came closer than I expected. I really can't shoot."

"No, it doesn't look that way," he replied dryly, her explanation somehow lacking conviction. "And now that you've told your wild friend that you'll take care of this, what do you propose to do with me?"

Her eyes were bent seriously on him, and the coolness of tempered steel continued in her haughty bearing.

"I assume you are out on duty," she countered. "Did you eypect to find your man up here?"

He shifted uncomfortably. "I thought there might be a trail this way into Singing River Valley."

Faint lines formed between her eyes. "And is there some one in Singing River Valley you are looking for?"

"Not any more," Dan replied, and colored, confused. Even if he could have told her why he had ridden up there, her aloofness would have silenced him. And now he noticed that she kept flinging nervous glances down the trail from whence he had come. Apparently she wanted him to go. He moved toward his horse.

"I'm sorry about Joe's actions," she unbent a little. "He's a peculiar individual, but a faithful friend of mine."

Dan mounted. "Oh, that's all right, Miss Lane," he said. "I'm used to that kind of a reception. But thanks to you for your excellent—I mean lucky—marksmanship."

The vivid color in her cheeks deepened and for a second her poise wavered. An uncertain smile showed in the corners of her mouth, but she recovered almost instantly and her chin tilted up.

"It was nothing," she said. "But I would like to assure you there are no bad men in Singing River Valley, Mr. Landon."

At the note of dismissal in her voice, Dan touched his hand to his Stetson. His horse leaped away down the trail and he gave him his head for more than a mile. Then he drew up to a walk. Grimly he set his jaw. Again he had come face to face with the latent atmosphere of evasion he had encountered in this section. What lay behind it, he failed even to conjecture, but one thing he determined to do, and that was to stay until he had satisfactorily cleared it up.

Coming out at a point where he could command a view of the winding trail below, he saw a horseman moving toward him. For a time he watched the rider with idle interest. Then he recalled the girl's uneasy glances. Was there any connection between them and this newcomer? Dan turned off and rode into a thick growth of trees and dismounted. Leaving his horse, he made his way back along the mountainside until he came to where he could command a view above as well as below. Sitting down, he waited.

Presently the horseman came into sight. Dan crouched lower as he recognized Bart Thompson. The Thunder Mountain logger was dressed in a Western riding costume with a stiff new Stetson set at an angle on his head.

Dan looked up the trail. Cherrie Lane was riding slowly toward the owner. He watched the two approach, and saw Thompson lift his hat in greeting. As they came together, they stopped for a moment and then the girl swung around and they rode off in the direction of Singing River Valley.

Emerging from his hiding place, Dan retraced his steps. Mounting, he rode back to the trail and started for the camp.

"Well, I'll be dog-goned!" he ejaculated. "So that's the lay of the land! I can't very well blame Thompson's

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good judgment, but I sure hate to see that no-count son of a gun keeping company with a girl like her. That maverick don't look good to me, and she has too many earmarks of a thoroughbred to be mixing with his sort."

He rode on in deep thought. The logging owner fitted snugly into the groove Dan reserved for double-faced rogues masquerading under a suave disguise. But perhaps he was wrong. His snap judgment was not always accurate. Yet in this case he could not help but feel he was right.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN SIX-GUNS ARGUE.

FOLLOWING a new route that led to the farther slope of Thunder Mountain, it was late when Dan finally reached camp. The men had eaten, and while some of them lounged about in front of their bunk houses, many had gone to the saloon and card room, Dan judged by the sound of revelry wafted to him from that building at the end of the camp.

The deputy went to Slowfoot's shack, where he found the little fellow hunched up on his bunk.

"Thought you'd got lost," he greeted. "Did you get over into Singing River Valley?"

Dan shook his head. "Any chance to eat?" he asked, ignoring the bullcook's question.

"Yeah, the cook'll feed you. But you better hurry. He's a peevish cuss an' likes to get through his work. What's your plans for to-night?"

"I'm going to look around and then drop in on the men at the saloon."

Slowfoot sat up with a jerk. "Not on your life, kid," he exclaimed. "You're not goin' to go near that place."

"Why not?"

"'Cause there'll be trouble if you do. The boys are still sore about last night. That's just where they'd like to get you, an' when I say 'get' you, I mean just that."

"Well, I'll take a chance with them," said Dan stubbornly. He knew Slowfoot was right, yet in his present mood he welcomed an opportunity to get into action. Perhaps it would relieve his feelings.

The bullcock's eyes contracted and he scrutinized the deputy's face with searching intensity. "Say, you," he demanded, "what's eatin' on you? Act like you got a chip on your shoulder. Who riled you up?"

Dan forced a grin. The other was too discerning. "There's nothing the matter with me," he denied weakly. He started for the door. "I'll eat now and see you later." He hurried out before the bullcook could answer, but he heard him cussing to himself and mumbling something about the recklessness of youngsters.

By the time Dan had finished eating, it was dark, and he sauntered down to the saloon. As he drew near he saw the windows ablaze with light, and he noted the place was crowded with men.

Without hesitating, he stepped in. The red-faced bartender threw him a hasty glance and muttered something to a group of rough-looking loggers standing across from him. They turned their heads slowly, a cool, appraising look in their eyes. Others, lounging about the players at the card tables, did likewise. For an instant an ominous silence swept the room.

Dan knew they were waiting for his next move. He stepped up to the bar and the bartender edged toward him.

"Whisky," he ordered.

The bartender flipped a glass to the mahogany and placed a bottle beside it.

Dan poured a full glass. He knew every eye in the room was upon him. Unaccustomed to drinking, he realized that he could give no indication of it here. With a gesture that would have been a credit to any hard-drinking log-

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ger, he tossed the liquor down his throat, and disdainfully pushed the chaser of water away. Pulling a bill from his pocket, he tossed it on the bar. While the bartender was making change, Dan turned and swept the room with casual curiosity. There was an instant averting of eyes. The card games continued, and the loungers started talking among themselves.

Taking his change, Dan paused for a second and then moved indifferently across the room toward a group gathered about a card game. Out of the corner of his eye he studied the men. They were a rawboned group, flannel-shirted and stag-trousered. He was not surprised to note the presence of guns, some in holsters and others betraying their hiding places by bulges in the shirts.

Approaching the tables, he saw the back of the bullet-shaped head of one of the players. When the latter moved his head slightly, Dan saw the profile of Pete Marino. He edged around to the corner where he could see Pete's hand as well as the movement of the others in the room.

Immediately, Dan observed that the game was big and Pete was winning. The little bookkeeper's eyes were narrowed, and he played his cards with nervous gestures. It was draw poker. The other participants were burly fellows, broad-chested, with heavy, scowling features.

After a few minutes, Dan fixed his attention on Pete, who continued to win with regularity; and finally one of the men shoved in his last few chips, lost, and rose with a curse.

Dan reached into his pocket, pulled out a roll of bills, and laid it on the table. He sat down in the vacant seat without a word. For the first time, Pete looked up and saw him. His swarthy face paled perceptibly, and an uncertain light crept into his crafty eyes. Almost instantly he dropped them to his cards. The others flung Dan churlish looks, but said nothing.

After two hands, the deal came around to Dan. He shuffled the cards deliberately and dealt, leaving his cards lying face down for some time, studying their backs closely. Inwardly he smiled as he picked them up, but his face wore an expression of careless indifference as he continued to lose.

For more than an hour the play went on, and then the man at Dan's left apparently drew a good hand. All but Pete threw in their cards, but the latter continued to raise, and the other come back. Soon the stack in the middle reached proportions that sent a whisper about the room, and a crowd began to gather.

Dan quietly shoved his chair back a little and dropped his hands to his holsters. No one saw the move. Interest was tensely focused on the two players.

The logger next to Dan had pushed in his last chip and was about to turn his cards over when the deputy leaned forward, and in a voice that drawled said: "Just a minute, partner. Leave them face down!" He turned on the bookkeeper. "And you, too, Pete!" he commanded, his tone suddenly crisp. He looked up at the surprised faces about the table.

"Gents," he said, "I aim to show you a little trick before these pasteboards are turned over, and then I want you to use your own judgment. I'm going to name at least three of the cards in both hands, and then show you how it's done. Incidentally, I might mention that Pete over there has the winning hand."

The blood drained from Pete's face and the cords of his neck turned white. He leaped to his feet with a curse, and one hand went to his hip, but the move was so awkward and slow that Dan laughed as he brought his own guns up with lightning speed.

"Maybe I don't need to go any

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further," he said. "But just to show you gentlemen what I mean, I'll demonstrate." He shoved one of his guns back into its holster and, while he kept the other on Pete, he reached forward and drew the bookkeeper's cards across the table, their faces still downward. After scrutinizing their backs, he pushed three away from the others.

"Those happen to be queens." He turned to those of the player next to him, and fingered them for a second. "And you were calling with three tens." He stepped back. "All right, gentlemen. See if I'm not right."

Some one reached forward and flipped the cards over. An angry hiss escaped the lips of the bystanders as the cards exposed proved to be the ones Dan had named.

He held his hand up for silence. "Now, I don't know whether the house is playing with marked cards, but you can prove it very easily by looking through Pete's pockets. And if there ain't a house deck he exchanged for these, you lay this crookedness partly on the owner of this joint."

Angry hands immediately laid hold of Pete and, despite his efforts to wrench loose, others searched him. From a side pocket came a deck with the same backs as those used in the game.

Instantly a roar went up. Some one called for a rope. With wild curses, the players leaped to their feet and excitedly started toward the now cringing Pete.

"Steady, boys," Dan commanded. In a flash it occurred to him that the bookkeeper had suddenly become valuable. Pete's clumsy draw had proved that he had nothing to do with the holdups. But Thompson surely must have a good reason for having the crooked little fellow around.

The men, now fully incensed, were already dragging the whimpering Pete toward the door.

Dan sprang up on the table. "Here, you loggers," he shouted. "I'll take care of this. I represent the law."

His words were met with an angry growl from the men. One, apparently the ringleader, spoke hoarsely: "You're not the law up here, young feller! You butt in again and you won't ride back to town. We'll handle this case in our own way." He turned to the men. "Take him out an' string him up, boys. Make it snappy!"

Dan's gray eyes flashed. His jaw went out and his body dropped to a crouch. His guns were in his hands and the next instant one roared. There was a crash of glass as one of the lamps in the room was shattered.

The men whirled and hands went to guns.

"The first fellow who draws gets drilled!" Dan barked. His eyes swept the room and his hands moved threateningly in a slow semicircle.

One man in a far corner made a quick move for his hip. The deputy's gun cracked again. The man cried out in pain as he clutched at a splintered wrist.

"Now get over against the bar!" commanded Dan through his teeth. "Every one of you, but Pete."

There was a moment's hesitation, but as Dan jumped down from the table and approached them menacingly, the loggers backed away. His every move was like the stalking tread of a panther, and the fire of overpowering dominance gleamed from his narrowed eyes.

Pete was the picture of abject terror. He stood in the middle of the room trembling as with the ague.

Dan's eyes never left the group before him. "Pete," he said through the side of his mouth, nodding his head toward the door, "get out, and get out fast. I'll follow in a minute."

The frightened bookkeeper bolted for the outside. One of the men made a slight move and Dan turned on him with a snarl. The man stiffened again with a convulsive jerk.

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Dan edged around and moved toward the door. When he reached it, his face relaxed and he grinned broadly. His guns spun in his hands and dropped into their holsters.

"Gentlemen," he said with a dramatic gesture, "I accept your thanks for saving you from the reputation of being lynchers." He whirled and went out.

The street was practically deserted as Dan strode along, chuckling audibly. That bunch of loggers had proved less formidable than he had anticipated, and they had been unusually gullable over Pete's threadbare card trick. Well, he had discovered one thing of material importance in the holdups. Pete was not the man. His crude effort at gunmanship had proved it. But he knew more about Thompson than any one else. That was a certainty. The mine owner was too shrewd to have a crook like that around him unless there was a good reason.

Dan had reached the end of the street and paused uncertain which way to turn in search of Pete, when a momentary flash of light appeared in the windows of the commissary office. He waited for it to reappear, and when after several minutes the windows remained dark, he walked closer to investigate.

Quietly approaching the building from the rear, he peered through one of the windows. The room was black and he was about to move away when a circular glow of light in the opposite corner caught his eye. Next he made out a shadowy form kneeling before the safe.

Slipping noislessly around to the door, he turned the knob. It opened. In cautious silence he stepped in and closed it gently after him. Then he drew a match from his pocket. Pulling out one of his guns, he scratched the match.

It flared up. Instanty the man at the safe leaped to his feet and spun around. Pete's frightened face turned on the deputy. He saw the gun on him and his hands went up.

"Caught again, eh, Pete?" said Dan moving quickly across to the other. "Hand me that flashlight, and make it snappy."

Pete reached down and picked up the light and extended it to Dan, who dropped his match and brought the spot of light on the bookkeeper.

"You're sure on the prod to-night! I'd have thought one bad deal would have been enough. Now, hand over your gun."

The little man's face twitched in a paroxysm of utter despair, and his body seemed to wilt as he held the weapon out to the deputy.

"Well, you got me. Now what you going to do?" he whined.

"You know dog-gone well what I can do. I can give you the limit. But first I'm going to give you a chance. Come clean. Give me the whole dope on why you're pulling this and what you know about Thompson, and if you tell the truth, maybe you'll save yourself a little."

Pete shot him a scared look.

Dan saw the expression. "I know a lot you think I don't, kid," he bluffed. "So, remember, if you lie, you're due for the works."

"How do I know you'll let me off?" countered the other.

"You don't," snapped Dan. "But it's your only bet. Let's have it! Why are you robbing your boss?"

"I ain't robbing him," denied Pete. "I'm taking what he promised me."

"Haven't you been getting your salary?"

"Salary, say! He promised me more'n that! He knows I've got the goods on him."

Dan leaned forward. Here was a clew, if he could play it right. "Yes, I know that," he encouraged. "I've got most of the dope. Come on, let's hear your story."

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Again Pete flinched, and the look of a cornered animal came into his black eyes.

"Then you know Bart stole this timber," he blurted out angrily.

Dan controlled his surprise. "Sure, and that ain't all," he replied cryptically. "What I want is your story, and maybe you'll save yourself a job on the rock pile. That is, if you spill the truth. And I'll know whether you are coming clean or not."

"Well, there ain't much to tell," Pete whimpered, his whole attitude now one of hopeless resignation. "Old Colonel Standish owned this stand. Held it for years, and Bart heard he was trying to sell it. He got the old man to draw up the transfer and flashed a phony roll of bills.

"When the old man signed the papers, Bart had me witness the signature. We met him in an old shack over in Singing River Valley. Then he ups and crocks Standish on the head. We left him for dead, but some one came along and found him. Bart testified at a hearing and convinced them that we had left the old man hours before, and they decided some one else must have robbed him of the money Bart said he had paid him. They say he's still goofy. Got him in a hospital somewhere. Bart promised to give me a cut, but he ain't ever come through. Those marked cards got me in bad to-night, so I knew I couldn't stay here. That's why I figured on getting some cash and beating it."

Inwardly, Dan seethed with rage. So his hunch regarding Thompson had been right, although he admitted to himself that he had not sized him up as a man who would murder in cold blood.

"And what about those holdups?" he asked Pete.

"I don't know a thing about them," the other declared. "Except that some one actually pulled them off."

Dan felt he was telling the truth. He thought for a moment. He might as well get all the information he could while Pete was willing to talk. "Do you know Cherrie Lane?" he asked next.

"That's the jane from over in Singing River Valley that Bart's sweet on. He told me they were going to get married right away—maybe to-day. The yellow crook! I hate to see him marry a girl like her. I'll bet he's framed something to get her to do it."

Dan was stunned momentarily. While he had suspected Thompson's attitude toward Cherrie Lane, the fact that perhaps they were already married made his heart sink. This was why she was waiting for Bart on the trail that afternoon, and this also accounted for the absence of the camp owner that evening.

He started for the door. "Come on, Pete," he ordered.

"What you going to do to me? You ain't going to let those roughnecks get at me, are you?" The little man shivered with fear.

"If you've told me the truth, I'll pull I'm out of this," Dan assured him. "All I'm going to do now is to keep you where nobody else can find you, and where you'll be when I want you. Then I'm going skunk hunting."

He led Pete out across the deserted camp street toward Slowfoot's bunk house. They were about to enter when two horsemen dashed wildly into camp. Seeing Dan's flash light, which was still burning in his hand, they bore down on the two. Dan turned the light on them and they slid their horses to a sudden stop and sprang to the ground.

"What's the trouble, boys?" he demanded gruffly.

"The pay roll's been robbed again!" one panted. "We were bringing it up from town an' a guy held us up at the forks where the Singing River comes in."

"How many held you up?"

"Just one, a little guy. Somebody

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must have tipped him off we were comin' in with the money."

"Did he take it all?" Dan next asked.

"No, only part of it. Most of the gold and silver, though. Here's the rest." He held out a small leather sack. "I guess it was the same guy who pulled the other jobs. He had a horse. We heard him riding away up toward Singing River Valley."

By this time the other loggers who had heard the commotion came rushing out. Dan saw Slowfoot.

He turned on the rest. "All right, you fellows!" he ordered sharply. "Get what horses you have and follow me. I'm going on ahead and I'm taking the short cut across Thunder Mountain into Singing River Valley."

As the men started away, he motioned to Slowfoot to remain. Taking one of his own guns, he handed it to the surprised bullcook.

"Here, Slowfoot, take this and get two horses. I want you to take Pete to town and deliver him to Sheriff Graves, with strict instructions to lock him up. Tell Graves to start up here at once with a posse. But remember, Slowfoot, see that Pete's locked up, and don't let any one stop you. That's why I'm giving you this gun. If you do this, you'll never have to bullcook again." He swung on the bookkeeper. "Now listen, Pete, if you know what's good for you, be sure that you help Slowfoot in carrying out my orders."

Pete nodded. It was evident he was all too willing to get away from the camp.

Slowfoot looked from the gun in his hand to the deputy. Then he squared his shoulders and with a flourish, he leveled the weapon on Pete, who ducked.

"C'mon, Pete," the little bullcock's voice rang with authority. "We're goin' to town, an' I don't mean maybe." They left in single file, Pete in the lead and Slowfoot close behind.

CHAPTER VII.

DAN RIDES ALONE.

FIVE minutes later, while the camp was still in wild confusion with the men trying to get started, Dan was in the saddle, his horse racing toward the trail he had been on that morning. Calculating that this was a short cut to Singing River Valley, Dan reasoned that by hard riding he would either come in close behind the holdup man or else ahead of him. In either case, he would be near enough to follow his own plan of tracking him down.

There was also another reason why he wanted to get to Singing River Valley as soon as possible. He wanted to see Cherrie Lane. And if she were not there, he felt sure that he would find Thompson with her. And he determined to get Bart before he returned to camp.

Another thought had also occurred to him, but in view of the recent disclosures it lacked logic. Did Thompson know something about those holdups? Dan could imagine no plausible motive for the owner to rob his own pay roll, yet the idea that the robbery had something to do with Thompson's crookedness persisted.

Dan was surprised at the speed with which his mount traveled on the winding forest trail. After about two hours, he noticed the timber was becoming sparser. This indicated that they were getting higher, and he estimated they would soon reach the top of the divide. He pulled his horse down to a slower gait. He might need some reserve in case they had to put on speed later on.

After another hour the trees appeared only in small clusters, and lacked the giant size of those on the slopes of Thunder Mountain behind. The terrain was more open, and the trail began to descend. Dan was observing the first streaks of dawn against the eastern horizon when his mount suddenly threw

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up his head. His ears went forward, and he turned his head toward the valley to the left.

"Thanks, horse," said Dan, pulling the animal up. "You've got better hearing than I have. I'll take your word that some one's coming." He slipped from the saddle and walked ahead a few feet. He bent his ear to the valley below. The stillness of pre-dawn hung over the hills. But the faint click of a horse's steel shoe against rock came to him. Breathlessly he waited. Again he heard it. This time closer. Some one was riding up the trail toward him.

Quickly, Dan went back and led his horse off to a clump of brush. Then he crept forward to a large rock that afforded him a view ahead. He could hear the hoofbeats of the approaching horse now, headed directly toward the spot where he stood.

He drew his gun and tried to pierce the thick gloom. He wondered if he had been lucky enough to get on the course chosen by the holdup? Who else would be coming up there at that time of night? Whoever it was, Dan decided he would stop him.

He waited expectantly as the other drew nearer. He was not more than a hundred yards away and coming at almost full gallop. Then out of the darkness plunged a big horse. Dan jumped from behind the rock. He could just make out the form of the rider leaning low over his mount.

"Pull up, buddy!" Dan commanded. "I've got the drop on you."

A spurt of flame and the roar of a gun full in the deputy's face was the answer. The bullet spattered against the rock behind him. Simultaneously the big horse leaped aside. Dan ducked involuntarily, and his foot slipped and he fell forward on his face. He was on his feet instantly, but the other had turned and was racing off to the left.

Dan sprang for his mount. The animal, sensing a race, was away before he had gained the saddle. The deputy was certain the stranger was the holdup or some one equally anxious to avoid being caught. As his own horse started in pursuit, he could hear the rapid pounding of the fleeing animal's hoofs. It was apparent after a few moments that the other knew the country. Dan's only hope was to keep within earshot until daylight. He anticipated more gunfire, but none came, and it was yet too dark to waste any ammunition himself.

Both horses were traveling at a terrific pace for such rugged ground. If either stepped in a hole or slipped there would be no telling what might happen to the rider.

For more than a mile they raced on, Dan pressing his mount to its utmost to keep pace with the one ahead. Presently he noticed they were shunting around a low butte from which crumbled rock had fallen and lay across their path. No sooner did he become aware of this, than he reined in. The horseman ahead would see the necessity of doing likewise, he was sure. In the thinning dusk, Dan could vaguely see him. He pulled his gun for a random shot, when the big horse, whose pace had not been slackened over the loose rock, stumbled and went down.

In a few leaps his own horse was at the spot. Dan was out of the saddle before the animal stopped, and with his gun drawn, ran down the gully where the other horse and rider had rolled. A slight figure struggled to its feet from a thick brush heap where the fall had been checked.

Dan sprang forward, his gun on the stranger. "One move and I'll drop you!" he warned. "Start clawing the air!"

The other made no move to obey. Instead, he faced the deputy defiantly, with both hands hanging at his sides.

"Go ahead and shoot! I wish you would!"

It was the voice of Cherrie Lane.

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Dan's gun dropped. With an exclamation, he stepped forward and stared into the white face of the girl. Her mouth quivered before his penetrating scrutiny, but in her black eyes a challenge still flamed.

"Cherrie!" he cried, using the name unconsciously. "You! Why, I nearly shot you! I thought you were the fellow who held up the pay roll."

"Well!" she said, with a hopeless catch in her voice. She nodded toward the horse who had scrambled to his feet and had come up to her.

Dan looked. From the horn of the saddle hung a half-filled sack. He walked over and felt it. A gasp of surprise escaped his lips. He easily guessed its contents.

As he turned back to the girl, his face registered his amazement. "Where did you get that?" he demanded.

A tired smile formed in the corners of her mouth. She shrugged resignedly. "I won't lie to you, Mr. Landon. I got it just where you think I did."

"You—you held up——" Dan stopped short. Like an explosion, the truth struck him. He recalled the description of the holdup. He remembered how Cherrie had used her gun when she shot the rifle out of the Indian's hands.

Apparently she saw the look of comprehension on his face. Extending her hand, she took the reins of her horse. "I suppose we might as well start back," she murmured.

Dan reached her side and grasped her almost roughly by the arm. Swinging her around until she faced him, he plumbed the depths of her eyes searchingly.

"Cher—Miss Lane," he stammered. "We're not going back until you explain all this to me. I don't want to arrest you." His voice softened and was almost pleading. "I'm sure you can clear this up. Won't you tell me? I really want to help you."

"What good would it do?" she returned bitterly. "I took the money. I'm a crook in the eyes of the law."

"I happen to be the only law around here now," declared Dan firmly. "And you're not a crook in my eyes. There must be a good reason behind all this."

"Oh, there's a reason behind it," she assured him quickly.

"Then tell me," he urged. "I'm positive I can help you—and I want to."

The girl studied him intently, as if weighing his sincerity. Then she took a step toward him. There was sudden decision in the move. "I believe you, Dan Landon," she said with feeling. "And I will tell you."

A deep sense of relief swept Dan. A movement of his horse on the trail above them reminded him that the others might be coming any moment.

"Maybe we'd better find a more secluded place to talk," he proposed. "They'll be scouring these hills soon." He glanced about.

"We can go to an old cabin I know of just over the ridge," she suggested. "It belongs to Indian Joe, and it's well hidden."

"That'll be great," he said eagerly. He made a hurried inspection of her horse. "I don't think Blackie was hurt much in the fall."

She looked the animal over. "No, he's all right," she returned. "Do you want me to go ahead?"

The significance in the question made Dan look at her accusingly. She made an effort at a smile.

"You'll have to take the lead. I'll follow," he replied, going back up to his horse. Cherrie struck off, and he swung in behind her.

After crossing the ridge and dropping down into a small valley, now bathed in the radiance of a mountain dawn, she proceeded up the opposite slope toward a thick grove of second-growth firs. When they had ridden through these, Dan saw before them a small shake

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cabin set in the center of a little clearing.

Dismounting, Cherrie opened the door and walked in. Dan followed. The one room was bare, save for an old cook stove, a couple of chairs, a bunk, and a rough table. The girl sank wearily down on one of the chairs and looked up at Dan, who hitched himself on the table. He had an opportunity now to observe her closely for the first time. Her trim figure, clad in high boots, soiled khaki breeches, and heavy flannel shirt, open at the throat, revealed the fact that she had been riding hard. A cap was pulled down over her ears, almost covering her luminous eyes, which even now maintained a defiant challenge that sent a thrill of admiration through Dan.

"Well," she began, "there isn't a great deal to tell. First, my name isn't Cherrie Lane. It's Cherrie Standish. My father's first name is Lane, and I took that."

"Colonel Standish?" Dan interrupted quickly.

She nodded and her brows arched. "Do you know him?"

"No, I just heard something about him last night, but go on. I'll talk later."

Flinging him a searching glance, she continued, "Well, father has spent his life in these hills, and years ago he acquired the timber claim on Thunder Mountain. He always wanted to log it, but he never could get enough money together. I was in Bend, attending school, and one day I received a letter from him stating that he had succeeded in selling it at a high price, and that he would be down to see me as soon as the deal was closed. I waited for several weeks, but he didn't come, and then, one day, I got a message from the hospital in Portland saying he was there. The doctors said he was unconscious when he was brought in and they had found my name and address on a letter in his pocket."

Here the girl paused and her eyes misted. For a time Dan thought she might break down, but the next moment she had stiffened with a resolute gesture.

"I went to Portland at once," she went on. "When I got to the hospital, I found him in a state of delirium. They told me he had been found wandering in the hills below here. He had been struck on the head and was suffering from severe concussion. He babbled incoherently about selling his timber, but he wasn't lucid and we couldn't get any information from him how the accident happened. The officers up here reported that he had sold his timber and some one had struck him and robbed him of the money he had been paid. This was proved when they found a copy of a bill of sale in his pocket, showing that Bart Thompson had bought the timber and paid ten thousand dollars in cash.

"But I wasn't satisfied, so I came up to Singing River Valley, where I changed my name and stayed with an old settler and his wife. I made friends with Indian Joe, who knew and loved my father, and he helped me investigate. It wasn't long before I was certain from things I heard that Bart Thompson and his bookkeeper, Pete Marino, were crooked, and that they knew more about father's injuries than they had testified. Pete had signed the bill of sale as a witness.

"I needed money to pay the hospital and also get father East, where the doctors said an operation by specialists would clear his mind. With Indian Joe's help, I learned to ride and shoot, and then I decided to hold up the Thunder Mountain pay roll and take what I believed was my share. Indian Joe, by hanging around the camp, got all the information for me.

"But what I took wasn't enough to cover the expenses that followed, and so each time I needed more money, I had to stage another robbery. I was determined that father should get well. His condition has been improving and

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only one more operation is necessary, so to-night I took the money for that.

"Indian Joe was with me the night I first met you, and he followed you to the camp. Yesterday he heard Thompson telling you the plans for bringing the pay roll in. He was afraid you were after me, yesterday, that's why he tried to stop you on the trail. At other times, too, he has been overzealous in his loyalty to me. I had to almost threaten him to make him stop causing accidents to the equipment at the camp."

With a little sigh, the girl finished and looked up anxiously at Dan. Throughout the narrative his face had become harder, as he dovetailed her story with the information he had got during the past two days. Yet he could not help but remember what Marino had said about Thompson's feelings toward Cherrie.

"And your meetings with Thompson?" he asked, a note of apprehension in his words.

Cherrie dropped her eyes. "Yes, I even let him make love to me, thinking I could learn something." A shudder surged over her.

"Then you don't love him?" The question slipped out before Dan could check it. Even the eagerness with which it was put was poorly masked.

She drew herself up, and flung him a look of cold scorn. "Indeed not! How could I?"

"That's what I've been wondering," he replied, relieved. "But I wish you wouldn't look at me that way. It reminds me of the other times we have met."

The color rose to her cheeks. "I know I've been rude," she apologized. "But I knew what you were up here for, and I was afraid you would spoil everything for me."

Dan laughed and quietly slid from the table.

"Well, it looks like it's up to me to conclude your story."

She looked up at him with appealing eagerness. "Can you add anything?"

In answer, he told of Pete's confession. When he finished, her eyes welled with happiness.

"Oh," she breathed. "Then—then maybe father will get his timber back?"

"You're darn tootin' he will," Dan returned firmly. "But we've got to get busy and find Thompson. I've sent Marino into town with the bullcook, and Sheriff Graves ought to be at the camp by now. Let's start back."

As he moved toward the door, Cherrie laid her hand on his arm. "Mr.—Mr. Landon," she began hesitatingly.

"Make it Dan," he cut in with a smile.

"Well, then, Dan," she continued. "You don't know how much I appreciate what you've done for me. Will I have a chance to reward you?"

"Maybe," he answered awkwardly. The glow in her eyes had sent his heart thumping wildly. Right then he wanted to burst out and tell her what he would like to make that reward, but he was suddenly overcome with uncontrollable embarrassment.

"May—maybe we—we had better be going back," he stammered again, confused. "There's a lot of things to do."

Then he stopped short as the door behind them creaked. Cherrie gasped. Dan reached for his gun and whirled.

Standing before them in an attitude of arrogant accusation was Bart Thompson. In one hand he held the bag of money they had left on Cherrie's saddle. A sinister, gloating light shone in the logger's eyes. He smiled sardonically.

CHAPTER VIII.

THOMPSON SHOWS HIS HAND.

TAKEN by surprise, Cherrie and Dan stared at the intruder.

With marked deliberation, he closed the door and took a step toward them.

"I hope I didn't spoil your party," he said with a sneer. But judging from

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the evidence," he held up the bag, "I've found the holdups."

Dan continued to glare at him. He realized the awkward position inferred by Thompson, yet at the same time he was puzzled at the logger's presumption in view of the fact that his gun remained in his holster and Dan's was upon him.

Cherrie was the first to speak. "You lie, Bart Thompson!" she flared. "Mr. Landon has nothing——" But Dan laid a restraining hand on her arm and stepped in front of her toward Thompson.

"You haven't found anything," he said coolly. "Instead, you've walked right in where you're wanted." He moved forward, his gun before him. "Thompson," he went on, "you're under arrest for the attempted killing of one Colonel Lane Standish and for defrauding him out of his timber."

Bart Thompson winced as if from an inner shock. His face went gray, but almost instantly he regained his poise. A contemptuous smirk appeared at the corners of his mouth. With a disdainful glance at Dan's gun, he laughed out raucously.

"A tinhorn deputy sheriff!" he scoffed. "Talking pretty big, aren't you?"

Dan's face was livid. All the hatred he held for the logger seemed to accumulate at that moment in one impulse to leap at his throat. But a warning cry from Cherrie made him turn. She was staring wide-eyed at one of the windows, and following her gaze Dan perceived the long barrel of a rifle directly on him, and behind that a rough face. At the same time another man stepped through the door, a six-gun in each hand. He was immediately followed by a companion similarly armed. Dan recognized them as loggers from the Thunder Mountain camp. So this was the reason why Thompson had been so sure of himself.

"Did you think that I came alone?" the latter asked. "The boys have my orders to drill you the moment you try anything funny, so you might as well give over your shooting iron."

He stepped nearer the deputy. For a second Dan debated with himself whether he should make a fight of it, but experience had taught him the hopelessness of such a move. The odds were all against him, and getting shot would not help matters. He tossed his gun on the table.

Thompson signaled to his men to come forward. They approached Dan, and one of them produced a rope. As they grabbed him and started to bind his wrists behind his back, Dan again fought off the desire to put up a struggle.

Cherrie, who had been looking on in silent horror, strode boldly up to Thompson. Her black eyes flamed with bitter hatred.

"Bart," she cried vehemently, "if you harm him, I'll—I'll kill you with my own hands."

The logger swung on her. "So that's the way things are," he jeered. "You've been stringing him along like you have me. Well, young lady, you're not going to get off so easy yourself. When I get done with you, maybe you won't want to do any killing."

Dan's blood chilled when the full portent of Thompson's declaration struck him. He made a sudden effort to free himself, but his bonds were secure now, and his legs were being tied at the ankles. One of the loggers produced a long rope and knotted an end around Dan's neck. He threw the other over a rafter and drew it up until Dan was forced to rise on his toes to relieve the strain.

Thompson laughed derisively as he instructed the men to make the rope fast to a wooden peg in the side of the wall.

"Now, Dan Landon," he said, "try and get out of that. We expect to come back for you, but in case we don't, some one might accidentally find this place in

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a month or two." He turned on Cherrie and grabbed her roughly. She struggled helplessly in his powerful arms. "Things have turned out a little differently than I expected, Cherrie," he said triumphantly. "And I'm going to make the best of them." He called to one of the men. "Here, Buck, tie her hands!"

Quickly they tied her wrists and started for the door with her. As they went out, she flung Dan a look in which he read a wealth of meaning. He smiled reassuringly back at her, in spite of his position.

Outside, he heard them mounting, Thompson barking orders to his men. "Get back to camp as quick as you can and find that crooked Pete," he instructed. "Bring him with you, but I'll puncture every one of you if you let him escape. I'll be at the Rock Creek cabin."

Then they rode away and Dan gave his attention to his own predicament. The strain of being held on his toes was beginning to torture him, and he realized that he must do something to relieve it at once. Tensing the muscles of his neck, he threw his weight on the rope. The move nearly choked him, but he experienced deep relief when he felt the rope give slightly and discovered that he could rest his weight on his feet. His immediate situation became more comfortable after that.

For more than a half hour, he concentrated on the ropes that bound his wrists, but struggle as he might, he was unable to force them to stretch the slightest. At last he gave up in exhaustion and concerned himself with conjecturing what might happen to Cherrie.

There was no doubt that Thompson had guessed the source of his information and if the loggers succeeded in finding Pete, Cherrie's cause would be lost. But Dan felt he could rely upon Slowfoot and he was certain that the bullcook would follow his instructions to the letter. It all depended, however, on whether Pete would attempt to double cross him.

Bart Thompson evidently did not know who Cherrie was, but the fact that she had robbed him and then was found up here with the deputy was sufficient to make him vent his avid hatred upon her. The thought made Dan shudder. If he could only get loose! This was a pretty fix to be in. Thompson must have come back to camp in time to lead the loggers' pursuit of the holdup. He had followed his and Cherrie's trail to the cabin, recognized their horses, and sneaked up on them.

Well, if he ever got loose—Dan looked threatening. But judging from the thoroughness with which the loggers had trussed him up, the chances were mighty slim.

But presently a movement outside caught his interest. He listened. Again he heard a slight noise. Twisting around toward the window, he saw a brown face peering in. It was Indian Joe. Instantly the old fellow ducked when he saw Dan was looking at him.

"Hey, Indian Joe!" Dan called. "Come in and cut me loose!"

There was no sound, and as Dan waited it occurred to him that perhaps the Indian still held a grudge against him.

"Joe!" he called, louder this time. "Cherrie's in trouble. Bart Thompson's got her. Come here quick!"

Apparently this had its effect, for the door swung open and the old fellow stood on the threshold. He stared at Dan uncertainly and then glanced curiously about the room.

"Listen, Joe," said Dan exictedly. "Get me loose. Cherrie's in trouble. We've got to get her out of it. You've got to help."

The Indian bent his eyes on Dan with penetrating intensity. Then he seemed to make a decision. Drawing a knife from his belt, he slashed the ropes at Dan's wrists and ankles.

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"Where is Cherrie?" he asked in a guttural voice, stepping back.

While he rubbed the circulation back into his wrists, Dan quickly told the story of the holdup and Thompson's appearance.

The other's immobile features never altered, yet Dan saw a deadly gleam spring into his sable eyes.

"Now do you know where that Rock Creek cabin is?" the deputy asked.

The Indian nodded. "Yep. 'Bout t'ree mile over hill." He waved one hand to the westward.

"Can I find it?"

"Me, I go with you."

"No, I'm going alone," insisted Dan. "I want you to go back to the Thunder Mountain camp as quick as you can. Sheriff Graves ought to be there by now. I'll write him a note and you give it to him. If he isn't there yet, you go down the trail to town and give it to him."

Dan drew his notebook from his pocket. Hurriedly he scrawled a message to Graves, telling him briefly the situation and urging him to start for the mountain at once.

Thrusting the paper in the Indian's hand, he listened to the few words of directions as to how to reach the cabin, then pushed him through the door. "Now, hurry, Joe!" he commanded. "For Cherrie's sake, hurry!"

The Indian needed no further urging. He sprang on the bare back of his horse and the next moment he was pounding down the valley at a mile-eating pace.

Dan turned and looked about the clearing. Apparently, Thompson or his men had taken his horse. After a few minutes' search, he decided that his only course was to start out for the Rock Creek cabin on foot. It was imperative that he get there as soon as possible. He started away. The ground was fairly even and his route led down hill. This aided him in making good time.

After a half hour, he came to a rise of ground from where he could look down into a broad valley. In the distance he saw a small cabin half hidden by trees. According to the Indian's instructions that must be the place Thompson had mentioned. Now if only the timber owner were there or had left Cherrie in the cabin!

Dan ran down the hill and it was not until he was within a quarter of a mile of the place that he realized he had no guns. Well, he could not do anything about it, only he would have to be a little more cautious.

He circled and approached the cabin from the rear, keeping always hidden behind the trees and rocks. Within a hundred yards, he had detected no sign of life about the place, and a sudden dread seized him. What if they were not there? The horses should be somewhere, if this were the cabin. Dan looked around for some indication of the animals, but failed to find any. But there was quite a bit of timber and they could have strayed into it.

He crouched lower and crept up to the shack. Beneath a small window he stopped and quietly raised himself up and looked in. There was a table in the center of the room and on it lay a belt and pair of guns. Dan breathed easier. A movement on a bunk against the wall drew his eyes.

He made out the form of Cherrie. She was still bound and lay with her back to him. He quickly scanned the rest of the room. It was empty.

Dropping to the ground, he was considering the next procedure, when something moved through the trees to his right. It was Bart Thompson, hatless and gunless, coming toward the cabin with a pail of water. He was among the trees, and Dan quickly perceived he would have to pass across a small cleared space to reach the building.

All the maddened fury within Dan now reached the boiling point. He made for the clearing. He had to keep con-

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cealed behind the trees for fear the other would detect him, and he did not intend that the logger should have a chance of escape.

Thompson was coming along with his head down, and Dan waited until he was within a few paces of him. Then he stepped boldly out.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN MEN BATTLE.

WITH a start, Bart Thompson looked up. He dropped the pail, the water spilling over its sides, and his hands went instinctively to his hips. For a moment he gazed at Dan as though he doubted his reality, then his eyes fell to the deputy's gunless sides and his teeth bared in a vicious grin.

Dan's slender body went into a crouch and he moved forward, his fists clenched. His gray eyes shrank to mere pin points of cold steel. His lips were drawn-to-a-straight-line above his outflung jaw.

Bart Thompson's powerful body tensed and seemed to tower above the lithe frame of the other. A confident smirk spread across his face and from his dark eyes flashed a murderous gleam.

Two paces apart they paused like wild animals before a death struggle. Neither spoke. Words were useless. Both knew the portent of this battle. If they had their guns, it would be quicker, but none the less effective. Only one would go back to the cabin.

In that momentary lull a strange forboding hush swept ghostlike through the trees above them. A crow, which had been cawing noisily on a near-by fir, fell silent. Even the mountain wind died away.

Simultaneously they sprang at each other. Bart's great fists crashed with terrific force on his slighter opponent. Dan's body rocked under the blows, but his own arms shot out to the other's face and landed with dull thuds. At the same time, he leaped aside to avoid going down under Thompson's great weight. He whirled and met the next attack with cool deliberation.

Then they stood toe to toe. Flesh met flesh with sickening precision. The logger flailed his fists to every part of the deputy's body. Dan drove his with pistonlike regularity to the larger man's face. He knew he had little chance, except by placing his attack to vulnerable spots.

Both were gory, and their breath wheezed sharply through their teeth. It was a strength-sapping pace and each was calling upon that vast reserve of vitality born of a life in the open.

Suddenly, as though aware of his inability to beat his smaller antagonist down, Bart leaped. Dan attempted to side-step, but his high-heeled boot caught and he pitchel backward.

With a murderous, exultant cry, Thompson sprang upon him. The impact of his weight crushed the wind from Dan's body, and his opponent's fingers tightened around his throat. Dan felt them sink into his flesh and his mouth went open as he struggled for air. The agony made him writhe. He realized the immediate need to do something or he would soon lose consciousness. Already objects were spinning before his eyes.

Drawing up his knees, he succeeded in getting one foot in the pit of Thompson's stomach. He pulled upon every ounce of force remaining and straightened his leg. Bart's hands tore loose and he catapulted over backward. Dan swayed to his feet, choking and gasping. He wavered uncertainly and his knees seemed as if their joints had turned to water. His lungs filled with air and his vision cleared.

The logger was coming at him. Dan waited. He put all his strength into his next blow and aimed it at the other's jaw. It reached its mark with a resounding crack and the big man's body quivered. He shook his head like an

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angry bull, his bloodshot eyes momentarily glazed. Then he came on again.

An unnerving sense of helplessness seized Dan. It seemed that the last fraction of energy had been drained from him. Weakly he jumped aside and Thompson lunged past him. But the latter turned instantly and bored in again. Once more Dan avoided the rush, but now Thompson sensed victory. He threw caution away and tired to reach the deputy with his great clawing hands.

Dan stumbled awkwardly. If he could only regain a little more strength, but it would not come. Well, he had given his best. It was only a matter of seconds now. Oddly enough, his mind was clear and he thought of Cherrie. What would become of her?

Suddenly a cry smote the stillness. It came from the direction of the cabin, and Dan flung a quick glance over his shoulder. Coming toward them with her hands still bound behind her, was Cherrie. She was running and her face was flushed with excitement and concern.

Bart had heard her, too, and paused for an instant, then he leaped again at the deputy.

"Dan!" Cherrie screamed, as she took in the situation. "Get him, Dan!"

The words seemed to act on Dan with dynamic force. He felt a surge pass through his body. In that moment renewed power swept over him.

He met Thompson's rush with a vicious blow to the latter's heart. He followed it with another straight to the jaw. Bart wavered, and Dan saw his eyes dim. Again he drove his fists, first to the heart and then to the face. His whole weight was behind those blows.

Thompson stopped. For a second he rocked on his heels. His hands dropped limply to his sides.

Mustering everything within him, Dan crashed his fist flush to the other's exposed jaw. Bart's head snapped back on his shoulder, and his knees bowed. Next he went down, a battered, senseless hulk.

The force of Dan's rush carried him forward. He tried to regain his balance, but he had put his all into that last blow. He fell forward across the other's prostrate body. Consciousness seemed to be slipping from him when a tender voice in his ear caused him to feebly lift his head.

Cherrie was bending over him, her lips close to his. And through the mist that clouded his eyes, he saw her face aglow.

"Dan!" she breathed. "Dan, you won!"

Slowly he rolled over and drew himself to a sitting position. Wiping his face with the back of his hand, he stared at the girl and then at the form of Thompson. He looked back at Cherrie and saw that she kneeled with her hands still behind her.

Awkwardly he fumbled in his pocket and drew out his knife. She turned and he cut the thongs that bound her. Springing to her feet, she extended a hand to him.

"Come on, Dan," she said, glancing at Thompson, who had begun to groan. "Get up and we'll get the guns before he can move."

Dan struggled to his feet, and together they started for the cabin. But a wild shout and the pounding of many hoofs echoed across the valley. Down the slope came a group of horsemen, and in their lead was Sheriff Tom Graves, closely followed by Slowfoot and Indian Joe.

The riders saw the two and bore down on them. Sheriff Graves was on the ground before his horse had stopped. He rushed up and threw his arm about Dan's shoulder.

"Dan, boy!" he cried fervently. "I'm glad you're not dead. Indian Joe told us you had walked into death without a gun." Then he became aware of Dan's

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bruised face and the inert form of Bart Thompson. He flung a questioning look at the former.

Cherrie stepped forward. "Yes, Sheriff Graves, he licked him," she said simply.

The officer grinned at Dan. "Well, son, you got action, an' plenty of it, didn't you? D'you still want to go back up North with the Mounted?"

Dan did not reply. Instead, he looked at Cherrie. She moved closer and laid her hand on his arm.

"No, Tom," Dan said finally. "You said you always hoped I'd settle down and quit man hunting." An embarrassed flush showed on his battered face. "Well, I—I guess maybe I'd like to do that."

Sheriff Graves looked from one to the other in mute surprise. Then a heavy laugh burst from him. "Well, well, now ain't this a fine way to end a rough party?" He winked slyly at Cherrie. "And you?" he asked.

She colored. "I was just going to ask Dan if he wouldn't like to help me log Thunder Mountain," she said. "You see, he really isn't qualified any longer for the Mounted. He started out to get a robber, but he failed to get his man." She smiled mischievously up at him.

"How about it, son?" the sheriff inquired. "I thought you said you wouldn't be interested in logging."

"I've become interested in a lot of things since I came up here," Dan replied.

The officer coughed loudly. His eyes twinkled with merriment. He turned brusquely on the men, who had been watching from their saddles. "Here, you fellows," he ordered. "Get Thompson over to the cabin an' bring him around. Then see that he's securely bound. We'll be starting back at once."

Two of the deputies slipped from their horse and came forward. Lifting Thompson to his feet, they half carried, half dragged him toward the shack.

"I guess this ends Thompson's game," Graves observed to Dan. "Pete Marino told me the whole story, an' he's willin' to testify against Bart." He walked toward the cabin with the rest of his men. "We won't be needin' you two 'til we're ready to start," he called back over his shoulder.

Dan and Cherrie watched him go, and then they turned and looked at each other. It was a look that needed no interpretation in words.

Dan reached out and took Cherrie's hand and drew her to him. "Maybe I didn't get my man," he whispered in her ear, "but I got my woman."

NATURAL COLD-STORAGE PLANT

WHILE glaciers are, naturally enough, the most satisfactory type of ice house, it is not often that they are so conveniently placed for man's usage as the one at Elephant Point, Kotzebue Sound, Alaska.

This glacier, which is of easy access for ships, has been fashioned into an ideal storage plant for reindeer meat, pending its transportation to Seattle. A hundred-foot tunnel was cut into the solid ice, and a shaft driven through the top to permit the circulation of air. Besides the tunnel, several rooms were carved out, and in these five thousand reindeer carcasses were stored, previous to the arrival of the refrigerator ships which carried them to market.

Herders regard the finding of this natural ice house with great favor, since it will enable them to start the work of slaughtering much earlier than has been the custom.

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When Lions Roar

By Ben Jeris

Author of "Wolf! Wolf!"

UT—pumas, mountain lions, panthers, cougars, or whatever you choose to call them, do not screech," the bespectacled gentleman with the lisping voice protested.

"Dad" Jenkins grunted and removed the ancient pipe from his mouth. "Waal, I'm here t' tell you, stranger," he drawled, "that that there yowlin' yore listening to right now ain't no herd o' chipmunks at play."

The stranger inclined an attentive ear. From some indeterminate spot in the black hills behind Dad Jenkins' cabin there sounded a long-drawn, squalling cry. It had a disturbing human quality, like the anguished protest of a woman in pain. Although it was late spring and the early night air was not cold, the stranger shivered.

"Sounds mean," he muttered, and added: "I suppose you'll be telling me next that they're extremely dangerous—these big cats that are so plentiful hereabouts?"

"Dangerous!" Dad snorted, "I should say they was! Why, mister, I'd no more think o' traipsin' up that ravine at night than I would of—of pokin' a grizzly bear on the nose."

As he told this lie, the old miner flushed; but it was dark there before the little cabin, and the stranger did not see. Dad puffed furiously on his pipe to hide his mendacity.

"An' I wish you'd kind of pass the word around down to the Lazy S," he went on, determined now that he had started to lie to round his falsehood off in a businesslike manner. "I wish you'd tell 'em," he repeated, "that this here's a good place to keep away from. If

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them dudes—beggin' yore pardon—don't keep away from here, somebody is liable t' get all chawed up."

The stranger shuffled uneasily. He glanced back over the way he had come. It was something less than a hundred yards to the entrance to the ravine, and beyond that lay the open prairie. Gaining assurance evidently from the sight of the vast, rolling plain, which stretched as far as the eye could reach and which was, without question, free of mountain lions, he sighed relievedly.

"I'm inclined to believe you, old-timer," he said, "after hearing that screech, I can well believe that they are dangerous, mighty dangerous. And I'll pass the word along."

With this assurance, the stranger turned about and hurried away. Watching, Dad observed that his visitor's knickerbockered legs moved faster as their owner passed through the thicket of cottonwoods that grew at the edge of the plain.

For long after his visitor had disappeared in the direction of the Lazy S Ranch, where he was a guest, together with twenty or more other "dudes" from the East, the old prospector sat hunched on the doorstep of his cabin, lost in thought.

Finally, he slapped his thigh and rose to his feet. "I'll do it, by jing!" he muttered.

The task he had in mind necessitated a long and dusty search in the loft of his cabin. He finally found what he sought—an inch-thick board about a foot in width and six feet in length. With this under his arm he descended the rickety ladder to the cabin. Here, in the light of a flickering oil lamp, he labored, tongue in check, with a brush and a can of red paint.

Although there was little of the artist in Dad Jenkins, when the task to which he had set himself was finally completed, he observed the result with pardonable pride. In letters eight inches high he had printed a legend on the board which read:

BEWARE OF THE LIONS.

He spent considerable time going over the ground at the entrance to the blind canyon below his cabin and selecting a site for the sign. Just as the purple dusk was merging into night he decided upon two long-trunked cottonwoods. He fastened the sign to the trees and, chuckling, returned to his cabin.

As he drew near it, the moaning, squalling cry with which he had long since become familiar sounded from apparently close at hand. Dad stopped in mid-stride, cupped his hands, and answered the call. The old man was a born mimic. Perhaps thirty seconds his answering call had ceased echoing across the ravine, a snarling whine sounded from the cottonwood thicket not fifty feet away. Grinning, the old prospector cupped his hands once more. But this time the angry baying of a hound issued from his lips. There ensued a noisy crashing in the underbrush. Then there was silence.

Seated once more on the doorstep of his cabin, Dad Jenkins grinned up at the starlit sky. "Mebbe it'll work," he told himself; "mebbe it won't. But it can't do no harm."

Although not a recluse, Dad Jenkins did object to the almost constant stream of inquisitive strangers who, from early spring to late fall, threaded their way up the blind canyon to his home. They asked such danged fool questions! He had told Silas Woodford, who had turned his Lazy S Ranch into a summer resort for Eastern dudes, to keep his guests away; but Woodford had laughed. The old prospector had then threatened to bring his double-barreled shotgun into play. Woodford had merely laughed the louder.

"They don't hurt you none, Dad," the old rancher had said; "an' you're darned

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good local color, if you know what I mean. You're the typical desert rat. All of 'em have heard of desert rats. Most of 'em expect to find a sure-enough rat, with a tail, long ears, an' everythin'. When they see you—a sprightly, handsome old feller—why, it's just like a vaudeville show. They're tickled to death. The fact that you're the only honest-to-gosh desert rat in this here neck o' the woods makes you plumb valuable. An' like I say, they don't hurt you none."

Dad Jenkins had, of course, raved and cursed and promised dire things; but the never-ending stream of tourists kept coming. His talk with the bespectacled Lazy S guest that night had given him the idea for the warning sign. Of course, it probably would not amount to much. Those young cockydoodles who had once been sure enough cow pokes, but who were now merely guides, nurses, and strong-armed escorts to Silas Woodford's guests, would be quick to give him away to their charges. Still, that sign might keep some of them away.

It was true that Dad Jenkins was probably the last of his breed in that particular section of Arizona. But he had a profitable claim in the hills behind his cabin. During the past six years he had taken upward of twenty thousand dollars' worth of high-grade gold out of that prospect. There was still gold there. It was true, too, that the hills surrounding his cabin—particularly that wooded blind canyon in the entrance to which his cabin was placed—were literally alive with cougars. And squall they did occasionally, particularly in the fall and spring. But they were not dangerous. They would, of course, fight, if cornered or injured, but a squirrel would fight under similar conditions. Through long association with his tawny neighbors, Dad had come to pay them no attention whatever. At rare intervals, when he felt youthful and foolish, he did imitate them; sometimes, too, he practiced his mimicry for the edification of bands of wandering tourists. The tourists were usually scared; but their laughing guides always succeeded in quieting them before anything like a rout occurred.

Next day, as the miner was returning from his claim, he met his old friend, Radd Spear. Spear was the sheriff of Lincoln County. His eyes twinkling, the old officer shook a calloused finger in Dad's face.

"What d'you mean by puttin' up that sign, you old coot?" he asked.

Dad grinned. "It's my property, ain't it?" he barked. "Guess I kin post signs on my own property ef I wanta."

The sheriff laughed. "Sure, you kin," he agreed; "but if I had all your money I wouldn't be worryin' so much about little things."

"Little things!" Dad snorted. "Listen, here, ef you——"

"Fergit it," Spear interrupted laughingly. "I came here on business, you ol' magpie."

"Business," Dad repeated; "now, what have I done?"

The sheriff continued to laugh. "It ain't what you've done," he said; "it's what somebody may do to you."

The old timer sobered with ludicrous suddenness. "Do t' me?" he muttered. "What you drivin' at, Radd?"

"Just this," the sheriff answered. "I have reason t' believe that we've got an unpleasant visitor in our midst. His hind name is Uzzell, an' his front name is Jock. Not that he looks like a monkey. In fac', he's a downright nice-lookin' hombre. But he's a crook o' the first water. Usually passes hisself off as a gent o' leisure. The Secret Service people at Washington are lookin' for him in connection with a bank robbery. They traced him as far as Bridgewater. There he disappeared into thin air. Now, a feller like him couldn't very

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well lose hisself in the dessert or in the mountains. Neither could he hide away for any great length o' time in a town. The only place he could drop outta sight would be in one o' these here dude ranches—the Lazy S, or, perhaps, the Half Moon down in Lasher County. But the Half Moon don't take many dudes; the Lazy S has a lot of 'em! Looks t' me, under the circumstances, as though he would pick the Lazy S. Silas Woodford, o' course, claims he's sure of every man jack among his guests. Can't blame him for that. Still an' all, I gotta hunch that Jock Uzzell is right now a member o' Silas Woodford's dude colony."

Dad Jenkins was all ears. "An' is they a reward out for his capture?" he asked.

The sheriff grinned. "You would ask that, you ol' money grabber," he growled. "Yes, there's a reward—two thousand dollars. The——'

"That's why you're so interested," Dad Jenkins interrupted, chuckling. "Money grabber, eh? How about you, you danged ol' buzzard? Ef this here Uzzell feller was some cheap cattle rustler, you'd be sittin' down in your office, a-twiddlin' yore thumbs. Heh! Heh!"

Spear's red face grew still redder. Dad was joking, of course, and the sheriff knew it; he finally grinned and aimed a mighty blow at the old man's head. The blow fell short, as he had intended it should.

"All right," he sputtered, "we're even now! An' if you'll just shut up a minute, I'll finish my story. I came up here, Dad, t' warn you."

"Warn me?"

"That's what I said. It's known that this feller, Uzzell, was short o' ready money when he landed in Bridgewater. Woodford don't allow no card playin' for money, hence, the pore feller—Uzzell, I mean—will mebbe have t' do suthin' real naughty in order t' add t' his bank roll. Everybody knows you're rich as Crœsus. An' everybody knows that you keep yore dust right here. Now, I've told you a dozen times t' take that dust down t' the bank. I'm tellin' you again. This time, there's a dog-gone good reason why you should do it. An' muy pronto, at that."

But Dad Jenkins did not seem to be particularly impressed. "Go chase yoreself," he said; "all you do is mooch aroun' scarin' children, an'—an'—old men. You oughtta be ashamed o' yoreself."

And then, noticing the sudden flux of color that rendered the sheriff's full-face almost purple in hue, Dad decided to forego his bantering manner: "But you must be hungry, Radd," he said, "c'mon down t' the cabin and we'll rustle us some grub."

Although old in years, Dad Jenkins was not so in body. He was, as a matter of fact, an exceedingly competent old rascal, confident of his own abilities as any beardless youngster. So he gave the sheriff's story about Jock Uzzell scarcely a second thought.

The day following the sheriff's visit it rained. Dad's sole concession to his years was a slight susceptibility to rheumatism. Dampness always bothered him. So he stayed home this day. Huddled before a roaring fire, he became lost in the pages of a book which he had borrowed the winter before from Silas Woodford's library. So absorbed did he become that time passed unheeded. It was night when he finally tossed the book aside.

Being unused to such prolonged mental effort the old man was sleepy. He snuffed out the light, then stepped to the door and peered outside. The rain had ceased, but the night was black. Even the cluster of white birches thirty feet from the cabin was lost to sight in that inky void. The air was cool, and sweet with the odor of growing green things. Yawning, Dad closed the door, and with-

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out bothering to remove his clothes sprawled out on his bunk.

Just as he touched the balsam pillow, the squall of a panther sounded. Dad jumped as though he had been shot. He swore softly under his breath as another cry, coming from the opposite side of the ravine, answered the first one.

"Dad rat 'em!" he grumbled. "But what in heck's the matter with me? That book! Yessir—that danged book! Got me all haired up, it did."

Muttering, he pulled the blanket up to his chin, and tried to sleep. But the still night air seemed to be filled with a bedlam of sounds. Mostly, they were cougar sounds. "Never knew 'em t' act up so," the old man muttered. "They're hungry, prob'ly. An' they're all a-huntin' at once. Lots o' cubs t' feed, now, too. Them little fellers'll eat as much as a full-grown cat."

Despite the squalling racket that continued for several hours, the old man finally slept.

It was still dark when he was awakened. His first conscious impression was that the cabin door was open. A breath of cool, sweet-scented air enveloped him. Then, as his eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness, he thought he made out a moving shape near the wall on the opposite side of the room.

Ordinarily, Dad Jenkins would have come cautiously to his feet, found his old shotgun—which was the only weapon he possessed—and challenged the intruder. But to-night his thoughts were still with his recent reading. The story had been a sinister detective yarn. He could still see evil creatures slinking along shadowed walls. Yellow faces with staring eyes peered at him from the blackness. Grimacing wraiths of dead men gibbered and mocked.

Not sure, for the moment, whether he was asleep or awake or still lost in the make-believe world which the book had created for him, Dad got up and rubbed his eyes. When he looked again, he was almost certain that the door was open and that there was a living thing in the room with him!

His heart accelerated to an alarming speed. His body grew tense. And then there was a crashing racket. Even as he yelled at the top of his lungs, Dad knew that his midnight visitor had kicked over the shotgun, which had stood against the opposite wall.

There was a flurry of movement. Long fingers reached out of the blackness and fumbled gropingly about the old man's face. The fingers were cold and clammy, but they belonged to a human being. They brushed Dad's cheek, slid down off his chin, and closed upon his throat.

With a gasping intake of breath, reality came back to the old man. He struck at the clutching fingers and kicked out savagely. The downward blow with his fist struck a rigid arm. The kick might have accomplished something had his feet not been well tangled up in the blankets.

Dad Jenkins was no weakling; scared as he was, he fought manfully. But he was no match for his unseen opponent. There was bone-crushing strength in the fingers that gripped the old miner's throat. Freeing himself from the blankets, Dad came to his feet. He struck out wildly with his fists. His knuckles connected each time with soft flesh. But there was little power behind his blows. Sporadic flashes of red shot across the blackness before the old man's eyes. His lungs seemed as though they would burst. Even as he felt himself going, he kicked viciously with his hobnailed boots. His opponent swore, but his throttling grip seemed only to become tighter.

The end was inevitable. Realizing that he could not hope to break his enemy's hold, Dad—keenly alert now to the very real danger with which he was threatened—relaxed suddenly. Almost

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instantly, the hold at his throat relaxed, too. But the old miner had fought just a little too long. As he sprawled, gasping, upon the floor, there was a crashing flare of light before his eyes and he fell forward in a faint.

Just how long he lay in that faint Dad Jenkins never knew. When he struggled back to consciousness it was still dark. He clambered up, found the oil lamp, and lit it with trembling fingers.

A glance about the cabin confirmed his worst fears. He had been robbed! His gold was gone! So was the old shotgun, his only weapon.

With frantic haste the old man staggered dizzily about the cabin seeking for something, he really did not seem to know what.

"But he can't git far," he told himself; "dog-gone it, he jest can't, that's all! There was close t' a hundred pounds o' dust there. O' course, he was a big feller. But, nossir, he can't be far away."

Taking a candle from a shelf, he hurried out of the cabin. There, regardless of the fact that the light might betray him to the thief, he lit the candle and inspected the wet ground thoroughly. He found the robber's tracks almost immediately. Two sets there were. The thief had entered the ravine from the direction of the Lazy S Ranch. He had left in the opposite direction! In other words, the thief, emerging from the cabin with his heavy load of gold dust and nuggets, had become confused and had gone on up the blind canyon! But he had not returned down that canyon!

Dad snuffed out the candle, and stumbled back into the cabin. And then, as he stood there leaning against the wall, his thoughts seeking for a way to ensnare the thief, the staccato report of a rifle sounded. The shot had come from up the canyon, and not so far away. Two more shots sounded, following one another quickly.

Dad's thoughts were racing madly. What was the reason for those shots? A man familiar with the country could have found nothing to shoot at up there, in that canyon. Abruptly, Sheriff Radd Spear's warning occurred to Dad. Jock Uzzell! Those shots! Only a tenderfoot could have fired those shots, probably in panic over some imagined danger. Uzzell was an Easterner, therefore, a tenderfoot. The old man suddenly recalled that those fingers which had come so close to choking the life out of him had been soft.

"Somethin' must've scared him," the old man muttered. "Yessir, he must've been scared stiff, or—with that load o' gold on his back an' just after havin', for all he knew, killed a man—he wouldn't do no shootin' unless he was up against somethin' plumb serious."

Abruptly then, a squalling cry rang down the wooded ravine.

"A lion!" the old man exclaimed. "Yessir, that's it. Uzzell stumbled onto a lion. Scared him stiff. He'll come a-runnin', or I'm a cockeyed she-wolf."

Quickly, then, the miner bestirred himself. He caught down a coil of rope from the wall, and clutching the lighted candle again rushed out of the cabin. The first faint hint of dawn was graying the eastern sky. The clump of white birches across the way stood out dimly in the half light. Dad tossed his candle aside, fastened one end of the rope to a corner of the cabin and the other end to the clump of white birches on the opposite side of the thirty-foot span of level, gravelly ground. At no spot was the rope more than a foot above the ground. His task completed, Dad sat down on a rock to rest. He was very tired. There was a ringing noise in his head and his vision was uncertain. A cold sweat came out on his forehead as he crouched there. He felt faint and cold all over.

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"Heck," he muttered, "feel like I was goin' t' cave in." He got uncertainly to his feet and started toward the cabin. But the effort was too much for him. He had come much closer to death than he guessed. He reached the cabin, but just as he stumbled over the doorsill everything went black and he tumbled forward.

Dad struggled back to consciousness, this time, spitting and sputtering as dipperfuls of cold water were dashed into his upturned face. Gasping for breath, he looked up and saw Sheriff Radd Spear. The old man came quickly up on an elbow and looked about. The first thing he saw was a leather poke lying on the ground right at the sheriff's feet.

"My dust!" he cried.

The sheriff nodded. There was none of his usual joviality evident in the officer's ruddy face.

"What—what happened, Radd?" the old man gasped. "You got him?"

"Yes, an' no," Spear replied. "He—he's dead. An' there's yore dust."

"Dead?" Dad exclaimed.

The sheriff nodded slowly. He pointed toward a blanketed form not a dozen feet away.

"He tripped over the rope," Dad marveled.

"Yes, he tripped over the rope," the sheriff confirmed. "But that warn't all, Dad. One o' yore pet mountain lions got him."

For a long minute Dad Jenkins digested this statement. "Are you tryin' t' tell me, Radd," he finally said, speaking very slowly, "that that feller was actually kilt by a lion?"

"He sure was," said Sheriff Radd Spear. "Clawed all t' bits. But he never knew what struck him, Dad. Unless I lose my guess, that feller was plumb scared t' death before the cat ever touched him."

Dad Jenkins swallowed hard. "But—but——" he stammered. "What happened, Radd? I—I don't understand it."

The sheriff shrugged. "They ain't nothin' t' marvel at when you know the story," he said. "To begin with, he got turned around when he came outta yore cabin last night. He went up the canyon instead o' down."

Dad nodded. "Yeah," he said, "I found that out."

"An' he must've run onto one of yore slinkin', yaller friends up there some place. He fired three shots. I found the shells. He was prob'ly scared stiff, but he sure knew how t' use that gun. One of those shots got a big male cougar right between the eyes. It was in a kind of cave that it happened. For a minute the poor feller must've thought there was mountain lions all around him. There was some cubs there, too, d'you see—also the female lion. He killed one o' the cubs, prob'ly with the barrel of the rifle, an' then, he beat it. It was the female what followed him. She jumped him, up the road a piece. He fell over your rope, then, she jumped him again."

For the moment Dad Jenkins could not find words to express his astonishment.

"An' you was darned lucky, if you ask me, old-timer," the sheriff went on. "The feller was Uzzell, right enough. I got hep t' him yesterday while nosin' around among Silas Woodford's payin' guests. As it turned out, I didn't locate my man quite soon enough. By the time I had sort of pieced things t'gether an' decided which one o' them fellers was my man, he had disappeared. He had been seen headin' in this direction, however, so I mooched out here, pronto."

The sheriff paused a minute to light his pipe.

"I lost him," he continued, "down there at the mouth of the canyon. Y'see, I didn't akcherly think he'd come here; I thought he was aimin' on makin'

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a get-away; must've known I was after him; figured he was lookin' for the overland trail. But, you was his meat. I found his tracks this mornin', down there by that fancy sign o' yourn. He got there afore dark an' squatted right underneath that there sign ontil night. Then——"

"Right under that sign, you say, Radd?" Dadd interrupted.

The sheriff nodded. "Yes," he said, "right under it."

"So that he couldn't help seein' it?"

"Yes."

"An' it warn't dark, yet?"

"No, it wasn't dark when he got there."

Dad Jenkins shook his head sadly from side to side. "Pore feller," he muttered, "p'haps he couldn't read."

HISTORY DATED BY TREE RINGS

OLD beams and timbers from the Indian pueblos of the Southwest are now coming into their share of attention, for a grant of five thousand dollars has recently been made by the National Geographic Society for the purpose of research in this direction. And the motive back of this appropriation is an attempt to discover from the timber rings something of past history.

Work of this sort in the Southwest has already been carried on under the supervision of Doctor Albert E. Douglass, of the University of Arizona. So far, two unbroken sequences of rings have been assembled, one extending from the present to the year 1260; the other a prehistoric sequence of six centuries. Even if the beams studied have been charred into charcoal, the story told by their rings can still be read.

In fact, the Washington headquarters of the National Geographic Society has commented as follows: "With saws and drills and microscopes, specialists are digging from the heart of ancient logs and beams a more accurate calendar of happenings in the southwestern part of the United States than that which we possess for the civilization of the Egyptians or the Mayas. The work is based on the fact that each one of the annually-created rings on the trunks of trees has an individuality of its own—a different width or character resulting from climatic or seasonal differences.

"All trees in a given region show the same ring sequence. And some of the rings, deposited in an especially characteristic season of drought or moisture, stand out as though stamped with the year. And in consequence of this remarkable scientific discovery, much chronological history seems in a fair way to be revealed.

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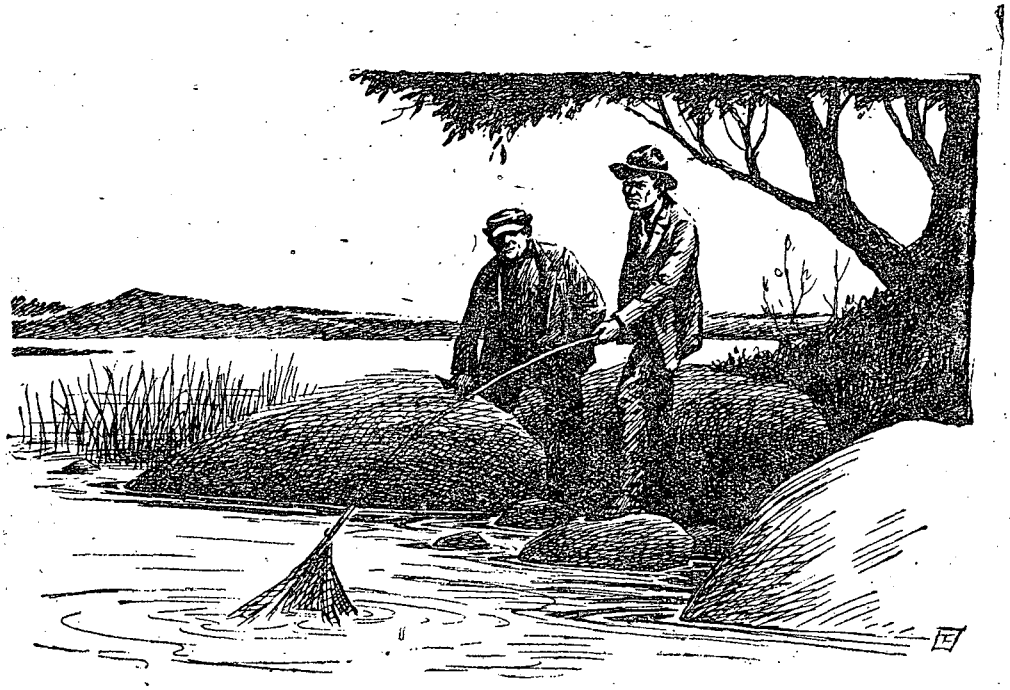

Reel Sports

By Seth Ranger

Author of "Not Worth His Feed," etc.

THE sun cleared the snow-laden Coast Range, and the first light of the new day struck the rainbow colors of the big trout as he lay off the river mouth. Hundreds of his kind floated at the same depth, waiting. But of the entire school he was clearly the largest.

This was the fourth year of his life and the fourth time he had returned to the river. He did not know why he swam to this particular spot, except that he was impelled to do so by mysterious force. Having arrived, this same force now halted him until such time as a heavy rain or a snow-melting chinook wind filled the streams. Then it would be easier to swim the rapids. Fifteen miles up river the country was less rugged. The stream spread out and became a series of shallows and deep pools through which water ran slowly. In this quiet area, hemmed in by peaks, his kind, which men called steelhead, spawned.

Unlike the salmon, which dies upon spawning and pollutes the stream until the narrows are often dammed by rotting bodies, the steelhead returns to salt water.

The quiet of the morning was suddenly broken by the swift attack of a hair seal. The seal's smooth body moved with incredible speed. The school was broken up instantly; the water seemed filled with moving rainbows as the sun's rays struck the trout at varying angles. There was method in the seal's attack. He did not rush blindly at the school, but selected his victim in advance—the largest trout of the school. From the point of his hook-scarred mouth to the tip of his tail the

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trout measured thirty-nine inches. He weighed around twenty-two pounds—a fair-sized meal for even a hair seal.

All the speed and power capable of lifting his silver body over a waterfall went into the trout's effort to escape. He passed like a shadow into the depths and shot between the fangs of an offshore reef. A swirl of seaweed was left in his wake. The seal's teeth had nipped the tip of his tail, and that was the margin of the trout's safety. Hardly pausing, the seal swung back and a hundred yards from the reef encountered a second school. This time he selected the nearest trout. Again there was a momentary flash of rainbow and silver. Then came a darker stain; the water turned crimson as the seal came to the surface with the trout in his mouth.

As he looked about the sun was darkened by a cloud rolling up from the South. The cold waters of Puget Sound were stirred by a breeze that carried with it the warmth of the Southland—the chinook had arrived.

In the highest peaks the snow began to melt. Curiously enough, the melting began at the upper levels and snow water rushed over and thawed the frozen crust of the lower fields. Tiny streams became roaring torrents; the clear water of the Snoqualmie River changed to a gray, swift-moving flood. On its crest the river carried the débris of the upper country—fallen trees with green leaves; snag torn from river bars; farm fence rails; parts of bridges, and the muck strewn along the banks for the past year.

The gray stain swept into the salt water of the sound and spread wider and deeper until the force was spent and tides carried it away to clear and settle.

Again instinct spoke. The steelhead moved into the flood, swimming deep, rushing the rapids, resting in the pools, but always moving upward while the débris swept seaward above their heads. For them the perils of the sound had been exchanged for a different peril. In place of the seal there were the illegal gill nets spread in the river by poachers. Luck rather than skill played a big part here. Floating in the currents of the finest pools were hooks cleverly concealed in gobs of fresh salmon eggs. The wisest old trout could not resist this bait when properly placed. Once hooked, the skill and fighting qualities of the trout must prevail against the skill and strength of the man if the steelhead were to continue upstream to the spawning beds.

The big trout continued from pool to pool by easy stages. The storm passed on and the water cleared until once more the sunlight reached the granite floor of the deepest pools. The fish became wary. Passing shadows sent them scurrying to the depths. In sounding alarms, the big trout was a leader. In avoiding traps, he taught the others many a lesson. Dawn of the tenth day after leaving salt water found him in the big pool. Just above, a waterfall spilled in. To hurdle this fall, often required repeated attempts. Often, trout failed to make it. They lay close to the bottom, dozens of them, resting and eating the food brought down by the stream.

To their keen eyes came a flash of pink about an inch square. It stained the water with a white substance that all but concealed the shank of a steel hook. A half dozen rushed with open mouths at the bait. The nearest swept it into his throat. Almost at the same second he swam furiously about the pool. An invisible leader cut against the bodies of the others. The big trout felt his scales turn as the leader was dragged from his tail to middle. He darted downstream, followed by the school. In a minute's time the pool was empty, except for the trout that grew tired with each mighty effort to escape; the trout that was drawn nearer and nearer the surface; and to the waiting net.

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Again the trout obeyed the impulse to move upstream. The big pool was filling. Again they rested, and again the leader resumed the struggle against the current. It was raining, and the water was stained. The leader darted at the falls with gathering speed, felt the rush of the current, and fought three feet above the surface of the pool before he was thrown back. He lay motionless in the bottom of the pool, resting. Others left the school, made their bid, and were thrown back.

Toward dawn, the big steelhead tried again. Three times in the past he had conquered the falls under similar conditions. He passed like a shadow from the bottom of the pool, leaped into the air and at the curving crest of the flood. His gleaming body was visible in the foam and spray for a brief moment, then dropped into an eddy above the pool. His momentum had carried him through again. His rest was short, for the current was strong here. Gathering the last of his strength, the big trout rushed through white water into the upper pool.

Something closed over his head and slipped behind his gills. Invisible hands gripped him. He swam with all his strength and moved but a few inches before the force thrust him back. When he let the current carry his body downstream, the same force held him. But the fighting heart knew not the meaning of the word quit. He continued fighting until his silvery body was torn, until his gills moved feebly and the last of his strength had been spent. Then he floated inert, swinging ponderously, the plaything of the current. From time to time he felt the invisible thing that held him, move. He caught sight of other trout fighting the thing and slowly losing the struggle, then the thing would become very quiet again, except for the ever steady movement of the stream—quiet like something awaiting its prey.

Holt Gilmour blew on his half-frozen hands, then reeled in his line. "There's not a trout in the river," he complained, "and after that chinook there should be hundreds of 'em."

"They're not bitting," his partner, Bill Madigan, replied. "They're here, but they're turning up their nose at our bait. This steelhead fishing is the cussedest sport I know of. You catch 'em just often enough to keep at it. I didn't get a strike last year and I solemnly swore I'd never go steelheading again. I resolved that for once I'd be strong; use my head, and stay away. I determined not to be a weak-spined thing of putty, a crazy optimist, fool enough to think I could catch one of the big trout. Well, you know what happened. Some guy wrote an article in the paper about steelheading. That was a week before the season opened. I dropped everything and overhauled my gear. Thinking the old leaders would not hold, I bought a flock of new ones. Then I didn't like the old pole and I got a new pole. Some one said I had the wrong kind of a reel. New reel. Of course, I had to have new line and hooks. Here I am, according to Hoyle, and the fish not biting! All I've got for three tries is chapped hands, a bad cold, and my name in the paper. You saw the item, didn't you? No? Well, it read like this:

"'Among the steelhead enthusiasts who will compete for the P. & T. Cup for the biggest steelhead caught this year is William—Bill—Madigan, the well-known sportsman.'

"That's what I was termed, a well-known sportsman. Sportsman! Say! I'm no sportsman. Right now I'm in a mood to dynamite the stream. If I had a gill net I'd use it. And what's more, if I ever catch a steelhead I'm not going to play him. I'm going to get a flock of gaff hooks and gaff him the second he's hooked. I won't give him a Chinaman's chance. When the battle is all over and he's flopping around on the rocks I'm

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going to say, 'Ha Ha! me proud beauty, laugh this off!' "

"Gill nets," said Gilmour, ignoring his friend's outburst, "that's about the trouble. Somebody's got a gill net in this stream, and that's why we're not getting any."

"More power to 'em," stormed Madigan. "Any way to catch the cusses, say I. And once I was fool enough to think I could land that cup! Remember last year? Remember the big fellow I hooked? Aw, laugh, you big sap! You're like the rest of 'em—you won't believe that he busted a steel leader. Well, anyway, that was my big chance to grab the cup and the fish spoiled it. I'll bet he weighed twenty pounds if he weighed an ounce."

Madigan drew back his pole and cast the line. But the cold air had frozen it. The line stuck just long enough to upset his calculations, and he got a backlash for his trouble. Before he could untangle the backlash, the line had frozen there. He swore and thrust his fingers into his mouth to warm them.

Gilmour worked his way to a log jam and got down on his stomach. One boot trailed in the water as he looked into the pool under the jam. "Not a trout in sight," he grunted. "That settles it. Let's call it a day and go downstream."

Madigan wound up his line, backslash and all, disjointed the pole, and followed Gilmour downstream. Tiny ponds in the trail were filmed with ice that broke through with the tinkle of breaking glass. The crunch of their boots on the frozen forest rot sounded sharply. Here and there a moody blue grouse sat on a log in the sunshine and pondered on the tough winter. Overhead the sky was clear and blue. The mountains towered like white marble above them, the clearness of the air adding to their height.

Occasionally, they passed a woodcutter's cabin huddled back in some draw. Smoke trailed lazily, leaving the faint and pleasant odor of burning cedar. White vapor came from the men's mouths as they breathed; their cheeks were ruddy. It was a tough sport, but it put a man in shape if he was fool enough to keep at it—most sportsmen were.

They stopped at the big pool. A full half was white water caused by the plunge of the falls, but the other half was clear, cold; the bottom was washed clean. Madigan was warm again, his manner genial. His keen eyes caught sight of something, half distorted, in the water. During an interval when the surface was smoother he looked again when the figure was less distorted.

"Hah," he whispered, "I'll have me a steelhead in about two minutes!"

He lashed a hook to a long pole, thrust it toward the object, and gave a quick jerk. "Got something!" he exclaimed, as he heaved on the pole.

"It's not a fish," Gilmour answered, "it doesn't wiggle enough." Madigan drew the strands of a net to the surface. "Look at that," he shouted.

At least a dozen big trout were showing signs of life. The change in position, the rush of water as the net was dragged through the swifter part of the stream, aroused them. Gilmour pulled the tops of his boots up around his thighs, drew his knife and waded out to within a couple of inches of his boot tops. He plunged an arm into the icy water and began cutting the trout free. It never occurred to either man to select the largest to take home as trophies of their skill.

"Gosh," Gilmore presently exclaimed, "here's a big baby!" He pulled the net nearer the surface. "Biggest steelhead I ever saw," he added. "Say—" The remainder of the sentence died. With a jerk of his tail the trout freed himself. Twice he darted about the pool, in his confusion his sense of direction lost, then he lashed toward the outlet.

Madigan could hear the beat of his fins as the trout swam past him. He

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looked up at his companion. "Considerable of a fish! Say, leave one in the net?"

"Why?"

"Evidence! I'm for staying here tonight and catching these birds."

"Feel different about fish, eh? Not so long ago you were threatening to use a net yourself, old sport," Gilmour reminded him.

"I've changed my mind. I'm not so cold now, and I'm not struggling with a backlash. Besides, it wasn't the trout's fault. Are you with me?"

"Sure!"

"Good! I'm after that cup. I can't get it without fish. And we won't have fish unless we make an example of these gill netters."

"Correct," agreed Gilmour, concealing a smile. He knew one of the real reasons back of Madigan's efforts. He was neither a good golfer nor a good trapshooter, but he could fish, though he had never won any honors. On the other hand, his wife played tennis and golf and the house was full of cups she had won. Gilmour had a hunch his companion was fed up on telling visitors, "Yes, my wife won this. No, I didn't win that, my wife won it."

They returned to the nearest town for a hot meal, then hurried back to the big pool. The net was undisturbed and appeared to have gathered in another trout. It presently grew dark, then cold. After a time it got colder. "A couple of chumps," Madigan growled. "We could have hauled in that big trout and given the boys something to talk about."

Frost settled on everything. They hardly dared move lest a sanpping twig warn the netters. They talked in whispers. Spray fell on Madigan's Mackinaw and froze. He observed it. "I'm going to a lot of trouble for that cup," he muttered. "I wonder why? I've never regarded myself as much of a sportsman. I've never had much proof of it. I kick too much about discomforts." He was silent for several minutes. "I've never admitted this before, Gilmour, but I hate to have a man bring in more than I do; bigger fish; bigger bucks—more of or bigger anything. That's why I know I'm not a sportsman."

"Your conduct is that of a sportsman," Gilmour reminded him.

"Sure, but maybe I act as I do because it's being done.. Maybe it's because I want the good opinion of others that I live up to the code. I do things I don't want to, to conform to the standard of conduct of the others."

The rumble of the falls was Madigan's answer. The coating of ice on his Mackinaw collar thickened. Cold stars hung low in the sky. There was a new moon hanging just above a mountain peak. As if discouraged, it slipped from view. "I'm paralyzed with the cold," Gilmour whispered. "I'm ready to call it a night."

"I'm not. The netters probably figure on that. They'll figure that by this time any watcher has been frozen out. Can you stand it another half hour?"

"Ten hours, if I were sure of action," Gilmore answered,

Twenty minutes of silence, then a voice forty feet away said softly: "Come on, Jim, the way's clear!"

It gave the watchers a start. The speaker had approached so silently and inspected the place that neither of the sportsmen had heard a sound. The roar of the falls was in his favor to some extent, but the snapping of a twig could have been heard. Then they saw him, looming dark against the ice-coated rocks.

Madigan placed a restraining hand on his partner's arm. "Let 'em make the haul first. We want to get 'em dead to rights."

Gilmour nodded. The man named Jim waded into the stream. Then it was observed that the other wore moc-

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casins to deaden the sound of his footsteps. Jim hauled away on the net and made some rather pointed comments on the catch. "Three steelhead," he grumbled, "not worth the risk."

"Somebody's got a net below us. The fish are coming up the river. That net should be loaded."

"Some one's hijacking on 'em," Madigan whispered. "Ready, old kid, for a workout."

"They're armed and we're not," warned Gilmour. "But I'm ready. Surprise is in our favor. You take that cuss with the spade beard. I'll take Jim."

"O. K."

Madigan quietly removed his rubber boots and stood in his stockings. "Let me have Jim," he whispered, "he's in the water. If I can get him out deep enough for his boots to fill it'll hamper his footwork and I can cut him down to my size."

Jim probably outweighed Madigan by fifty pounds. He was a ponderous fellow, packing an automatic pistol. As he stooped to remove a fish and roll it in a wet sack, Madigan leaped. The impact knocked the big man over backward. A howl of anger and surprise told Madigan his boot tops had gone under. A shot rang out and a jet of water leaping close to Jim indicated that the other poacher had opened fire. He was too busy making sure of his man to dodge bullets.

As they struggled, Madigan managed to shake the automatic pistol from Jim's holster. Then Jim hurled him back. Madigan backed off, with his opponent in hot pursuit. The instant he emerged from the water the poacher realized that each boot weighed several pounds. As he stooped to roll down the tops, Madigan stepped in and popped him. With a bellow of rage, he attempted to reach the elusive Irishman. Madigan backed away once more, then stepped in as Jim stooped to lighten his feet. He did not retreat this time, however, but continued to step around the poacher, driving blows home.

A shout from Gilmour cause Madigan to turn. His partner was going down under a hail of blows from the bearded man's automatic pistol. Madigan drove home another punch, then ran. He caught up a rock and hurled it at the head of Gilmour's man. It hit and bounced. Gilmour and his opponent went down in a heap. Madigan dived for the automatic; tugged a moment with the mechanism, and got it to working. "Stick 'em up, Jim," he said sweetly.

He secured his late opponent, then turned to the bearded poacher, who was just struggling to his feet. Another tap sent him down again. Madigan tied his hands and then turned to Gilmour. "Hurt?" he asked.

"No, just dazed. Some fight. You did most of it."

"Just a tough break," Madigan answered, "you slipped on an icy spot. That's why I took off my boots—that and the fact that I didn't want to fill with water and anchor myself. Quite a haul, and there's all the evidence we want. Let's get these birds to jail. We may get some fishing up here now."

"You deserve that cup, for this night's work," Gilmour answered. Then, driving their prisoners ahead of them, the pair started for the town.

Madigan shed his pack, jointed a steelhead rod, and fitted the reel in place. The competition downstream had become too keen and he had come far. Gilmour peered down between the logs of a jam in the river's bend. "Holy cats!" he cried. "What a wow!"

He did not know it, but the great trout that had fought its way upstream was within the reach of his gaff. It was the mate Gilmour had seen. She was far larger than the average trout. They had come into the pool during the night

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and were resting. A mile upstream were quiet waters and gravel bottoms in which they spawned. As Gilmour got up, the big steelhead moved from the shadows and darted swiftly at a Dolly Varden trout that had trailed them up the river. Dolly Vardens raided the spawning beds and ate the eggs. Salmon and steelhead alike forced them to keep their distance. The Dolly drifted back to undercut bank and waited. Patience had its reward, as he had learned.

Nor did he wait long. The pink of a square of salmon eggs came into view. The smaller of the two steelheads swung toward it. She was swift, but the Dolly was swifter. He snapped the eggs and then a mighty force dragged him from view.

"Heck" growled Madigan, "it was a Dolly! For a minute I thought—" He tossed the Dolly into the bank and baited his hook with care. The steelheads had grown wary by this time. Many baits that acted strangely when amateur hands held the rod, occasional hook-pricks and bumps from leaden sinkers had taught their lesson.

The bait, a small square of fresh salmon eggs, completely covered the hook. Madigan's movements were deliberate. He let out several feet of line, swung the pole back over his shoulder, then brought it swiftly forward. The reel whined as the lead pulled the line out. It dropped in the stream a hundred feet away. Again and again, Madigan repeated the performance. To catch a big, wary, experienced old trout everything must be handled with skill. The bait must be carried by the stream into the pool, as if washed there. It must move with the current and be sufficiently concealed, sufficiently elusive for a trout to grab it without too much inspection.

A low exclamation escaped Madigan's lips. He had dropped the bait exactly where he wanted it. A small eddy sucked the line around in a circle, then he felt the current take hold and carry lead, hook, and bait toward the pool. He paid out the line swiftly and waited. The line tightened and vibrated. His trained hands detected the difference between the lead dragging over the rocky bottom and a trout gently tugging as he mouthed the bait as a small boy sucks a piece of candy. His eyes danced with anticipation. "Gilmour, old kid, something's taken the bait," he said. A sort of sixth sense told him when to make the next move. He gave a swift jerk and the next instant the reel was singing. "Hooked him, Gil!" called Madigan.

The tight line moved swiftly about the pool, cutting the water cleanly and sending forth a fine spray that created a rainbow when the sunlight struck it. "Look out," Gilmour warned, "he's going for the log jam!"

The pole was almost bent double. Risking tearing the hook from the trout's mouth, Madigan kept him from the log jam. The trout sulked a moment, then with a rush started upstream. The reel became a blur. A hundred feet of line disappeared and the second hundred was nearly gone before Madigan began checking the rush. The trout was in white water now, but keeping well below the surface. The rise and fall as the water encountered the boulders threw the steelhead's weight suddenly on the line again and again. "I'll have to get him up farther," Madigan shouted, as he scrambled over the rocks. "He's a big one or I'm crazy with excitement." He pulled gently, his hand easily "feeling" the weight on the line.

Again the trout began unreeling the line the angler had reeled in foot by foot as he scrambled upstream over the rocks. Suddenly, the fish reversed himself. To keep the slack in the line from taking a turn around a boulder and snapping, the man plunged into the icy stream.

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Waist-deep he stood, clearing the line. An instant later, the reel was again singing. The trout was back to the pool, with Madigan following.

"You've fought him twenty minutes, Madigan," Gilmour shouted. "Twenty minutes and he hasn't broken water yet!"

"Get down and see if you can see him. If this baby gets away, I want to know something of what he looks like."

Gilmour spilled over the log jam and with his face even with the water waited. Two tense minutes passed, then a rush carried the trout to within five feet of the man. For a moment the steelhead seemed to be considering. The leader ran from his mouth at an angle. No part of the hook was visible.

As Gilmour scrambled ashore, he was pop-eyed. "That cup's yours if you can land that trout," he panted; "he's the biggest fish I've ever seen in a river. He's a yard long, and he'll weight sixteen pounds if he weighs an ounce."

"Allowing the usual twenty per cent discount for cash," Madigan answered, "he's still some fish."

"The cup," Madigan muttered, "why did you mention it? I'd forgotten I wanted it. I'd—heck! Now I'll be overcautious!" He began to wind in the line inch by inch—line the trout yielded grudgingly. Without warning, the trout broke water. For a second he was in the air, curved, furiously shaking his head to free himself of the hook. The sun turned his body to burnished silver, streaked with the colors of the rainbow. Then, with a ponderous splash, he was gone.

Downstream the battle raged for a quarter of a mile, then back to the pool again. Madigan's wrist was giving way under the strain. His legs were tired, and though there was ice on the quiet pools his face was streaming with perspiration. He'd land this prize alone if it took the last of his strength! Again he reeled in the line, fifty feet of it. Twenty feet remained. He got five more. Spent, shaking his head slowly as if confessing defeat, the big trout came to the surface. Madigan regarded him in amazement. "Never seen anything like it," he muttered. "What a beauty!"

"The gaff?" asked Gilmour.

"No, I'll work him into the shallows without it. I don't want to gaff him. He's too beautiful."

Again came that ponderous shake of the head. The trout had given his all to obey the instinct to reach the spawning beds. He had escaped the hair seal; hurled his body against jagged rocks; eluded the snares of careless fishermen; fought back the Dolly Vardens, and he had endured hours in the gill net before a keen knife in Madigan's hands had freed him. Driven downstream he had always turned back.

Exhausted, he was hauled into the shallows. Slowly the toe of Madigan's rubber boot drifted under his stomach. Then the man half kicked, half rolled the trout onto the gravel. With outstretched arms he fell on top, lest the steelhead suddenly flop back to the water again.

Gilmour was there with a tape. He measured. "Thirty-nine inches! Madigan, we'll light out right away and get him on the scales at P. & T's before he loses weight." Fishermen know that trout lose weight after they are out of the water a few hours.

Gilmour pulled out a set of pocket scales and lifted the struggling fish clear. When it had quieted sufficiently, he read the figures. "Twenty-two pounds and one ounce! What next, Madigan?"

"Look, Gilmour. There're five hooks in that old boy's mouth. Five times he's freed himself. But I hooked him. I landed him—the biggest caught in years!"

"The papers will have plenty to say about the well-known sportsman," Gilmour said with a grin.

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Madigan's eyes were on the hooks. Suddenly he removed one. "Look, Gilmour," he cried, "you saw me remove it! That's the hook I had made last year. Remember? There's my mark. Now will you believe I hooked a big one last year? Now will you?"

"I never doubted the big one got away last year," Gilmour answered. "And you got him again this year." He grinned again. "That cup's yours, Madigan. And when the wife shows her cups, you'll have one that'll——"

"Yes. I've been a rotten sport about the wife's cups, Gilmour. I'll never make a real sportsmen. I do too many things because they're done and not because I want to do them." Through the speaker's mind flashed the story the reporters would write—the battle; a picture of the fish; the fact that the fisherman had hooked him the previous year. "Look, Gil, the fresh marks of the gill net! He's got a marked tail. No, something's taken a bit out of it. What a tough time he had getting here! What a battle to obey an impulse that none of us understands!"

Gilmour was taking several photographs at different angles.

"He was a champion in life," Madigan muttered.

"A champion in death, too," Gilmour added. He looked at the trout again. "A champion, and stopped by a champion."

"That's a pretty cup," Madigan mused. He held the trout in his hands, hefting it, a wistful smile on his face. "I've always wanted that cup, too. Well, here goes." To Gilmour's amazement, Madigan tossed the trout into the pool. "Good luck, old boy, it was a sweet battle while it lasted! You're too game to end this way."

The big trout turned over on its side. Its silver belly gleamed in the sunlight. The gills moved slowly. With an effort, the big steelhead righted himself. His strength returned rapidly. He swam slowly toward the white water, then, with a rush, vanished upstream.

In Next Week's Issue of Western Story Magazine

WINDY RIDES 'EM ROUGH

By Robert Ormond Case

"Windy" and "Lonesome" are men not only of interest but of principle. It's O. K. to bust up a gent's crockery, according to their ethics, but it ain't right to leave him without a pot to cook in. Noble-hearted mavericks!

STARS AND CROSSES

By Roland Krebs

"Shorty," although a pretty good cow-puncher, felt that the drama was his racket, as you might say.

RIDIN' PROUD

By George Cory Franklin

Here's a hombre who's rounding up a big band of admirers among lovers of action and outdoors, fair play and fast riding.

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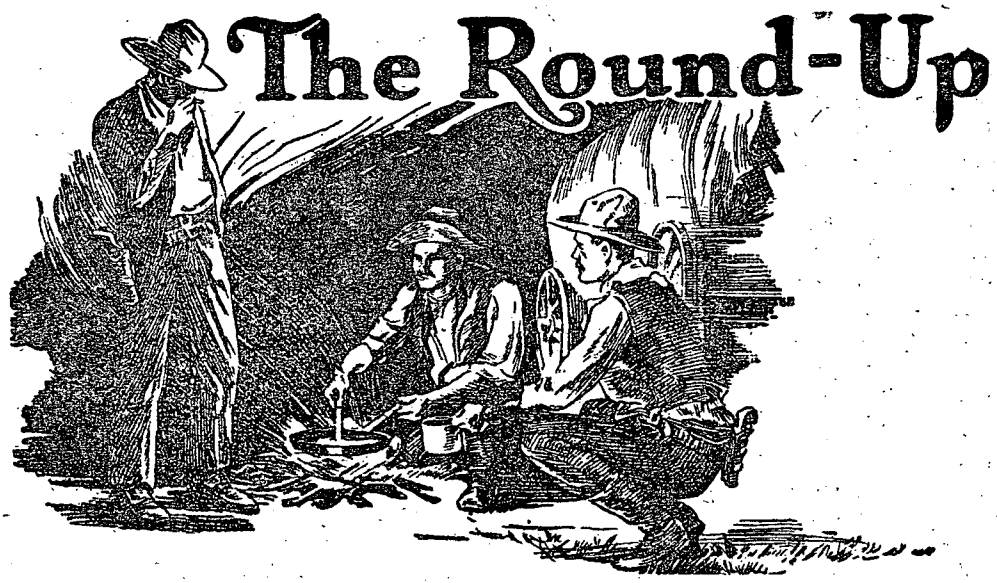

WHEN there is any shootin' to be done at these here meetin's, we always try to do it first. This bein' the case, we'll hear first and last the gun of F. C. Ness, 1428 East Presqueisle Street, Philipsburg, Pennsylvania.

"Boss of the Round-up: In your Round-up for the week of August 3, 1929, there was a talk on ballistic matters by Mr. Umstattd of Colfax, Illinois, which we heard with considerable interest. Quotations from our B & M Handbook are used as authority, and we greatly appreciate this; but, incidentally, the correct name and address is: Belding & Mull, Inc., Philipsburg, Penn.

"We had not intended entering into this discussion in The Round-up, but it has stirred up too much interest to be ignored, some shooters making trips from outside towns to our office for verification. Thinking that perhaps your readers at large might like to have the low-down on this business of comparative handgun power, we have decided to offer some authoritative sidelights pertinent to this subject.

"Energy tables apply to standard factory ammunition, and the energy rating of any caliber can easily be changed by handloading the cartridge. Some years ago the writer designed a 235-grain flat-nose bullet and developed a load that boosted the velocity of the .45 Colt S. A. to 1116 foot seconds and its energy to 650 foot pounds! The charge used was less than 14 grains weight of No. 80 smokeless powder, and the chamber pressure developed was safe, being slightly under 15,000 pounds per square inch. The most powerful factory cartridge for the .45 Colt is the 1924 Remington black-powder load, which drives a 250-grain bullet at 910 f. s. muzzle velocity and develops an energy of 460 foot pounds.

"But kinetic energy tells only part of the story. Shock power is estimated by multiplying the muzzle energy by the sectional area of the bullet in square inches. On this basis the .45 Colt black-powder cartridges comes first, followed by the .45 Auto Colt Pistol bullet of 200-grs.; the .45 Colt smokeless, third; the .45 ACP 230-gr. bullet, fourth; the .44 Special black-powder, fifth; and the .44-40 black-powder, sixth. The shock power ratings vary from 75, for the .45 Colt, to 2, for the best .22 Long Rifle cartridge. When confined to smokeless

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powder cartridges, the .44-40 comes ahead of the .44 Special, which is followed by the .38-40 and .38 ACP in order. With either powder, the .38 ACP is always ahead of the 9 m/m Luger, and the .38 Special is always above the .30 Luger. Shock Power is a better unit of measurement because it takes into consideration bullet diameter as well as weight and speed.

"However, there are other factors important to killing power; namely, the shape of the bullet nose and the character of the bullet surface. Lead-alloy bullets cause greater shock than jacketed bullets whose smooth metal surfaces create far less friction in passing through animal tissues. With two lead bullets of the same weight and diameter and speed, the one with the bluntest or flattest nose would normally have the greater killing power, because it would displace more tissue, or the same area of tissue, more quickly; hence more rudely. These two factors are particularly important in handgun shooting, because even maximum velocities reached are insufficient to adequately expand the bullets used.

"Killing power is also conditional on the absorption characteristics of the target. Thus, on large bear, penetration qualities of a cartridge become of the first importance, even if we have to go to medium weight and a hard bullet to get it. On dangerous game, like man, of high nervous vitality, a heavier, softer, blunter, bullet has better stopping effect, though a lower velocity must be used to get these essential cartridge qualities. The standard .38 Special 158-gr. bullet with slender ogive slips through animal tissues too easily, expending most of its energy beyond the target, and it is notoriously ineffective in regard to stopping qualities. That part of the total energy which is expended in or on the target itself, not beyond it, is the only portion which counts. The English idea of a heavy blunt-nose bullet at comparatively low speed is the correct one. Recently the Western Super-Police cartridge, driving a blunt 200-gr. lead bullet at only 750 f. s. greatly improved the .38 Special for defensive and police purposes. Handloaders get a similar improvement in a different way by driving the lighter but squarer-nosed B & M Manstopper bullets at a considerably higher velocity: over 1,000 f. s.

"The idea is to put a human antagonist out of fighting condition at the first shot, to knock large game down in its tracks, and to kill small game as quickly and mercifully as possible. Oddly enough, this effect is enhanced in some cases by actually lowering the energy and velocity without changing the bullet shape. As an example, the .22 Short is a better killer on such game as grouse than is the swifter .22 Long Rifle. The theory is that the .22 Short expends all its energy within the animal while the higher energy of the .22 Long Rifle is wasted beyond the target after it has expended only a very small portion in passing through the animal. This is a common experience to shooters who have had opportunities to observe the comparative killing effects of these two cartridges on small, soft game.

"There is a mass of semiofficial data on the comparative killing power of handgun calibers from miscellaneous doctor records and the police records, and there is also the broad experience of the army which led to the dropping of the ineffective .38 and the adoption of the .45 caliber pistol for military use. In 1904 the Army Ordinance Department conducted an official test to compare the stopping power and killing effect of various handgun cartridges. Included in the test were the .30 and .35 caliber Lugers and the .38 ACP with jacketed bullets; and with lead bullets the .38 revolver, the .45 Colt and a .476 caliber cartridge.

"For the study of concentration of

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energy and fracturing ability, ten corpses were used. No deformation of the jacketed bullets was obtained and practically none with the lead bullets, perforations being of the same diameter as the bullets used, the advantage in disturbed tissue areas going to the lead. On fractures to the bony structure of the human body, the jacketed bullets invariably made clean perforations, any advantage in shock effects going to the .38 ACP, while the lead bullets all showed greater fracturing ability, the apparent stopping power increasing with the weight and diameter of the bullet instead of with increases in velocity.

"For testing shock on living tissues, steers were shot rapid-fire through the lungs and intestines. With the .30 Luger the animals showed no signs of distress until after the eighth shot, and none dropped at the tenth shot. With the .38 ACP the steers showed greater distress, and dropped after six or seven shots. With the .45 Colt they showed greater distress and shock and dropped after four or five shots. With the special large caliber mentioned above, the animals evidenced shock effect at the first shot by tremors throughout their bodies and dropped at the third or fourth shot. The first or second .45 caliber bullet induced bleeding from the nose and mouth; no such hemorrhage resulted from the employment of the smaller calibers.

"In relative penetration, the .38 ACP leads, with the jacketed bullets of both Lugers and the .45 ACP ahead of all lead bullets, the .44 Special leading the revolver bullet list. Relative accuracy is based on machine rest tests and on the experience-based opinions of expert shots. Because individual guns of a given caliber sometimes perform much better than the normal run of its class, erroneously high accuracy claims are made for that caliber on the strength of that individual performance. Sometimes a gun showing fine intrinsic accuracy from a machine rest will perform poorly when fired from the hand on account of unfortunate design or wrong shape, such as poor grip, poor balance, or slow lock time. Hence the relative accuracy of certain handgun calibers will always be open to dispute. However, the mass of evidence already compiled and now available would place the revolver cartridges in the following order of accuracy: .22 Long Rifle, .38 Special, .44 Special, .45 Colt, .32-20, .38-40, and .44-40. The list of autoloading pistol cartridges would run: .45 ACP, .38 ACP, .30 Luger, and .35 Luger.

"These lists are purposely simplified of all lesser cartridges, but it is certain that any handgun cartridge is sufficiently accurate for practical purposes over the short ranges for which they are intended. For the finest shooting at short ranges, the size, shape, and angle of the grips and the balance of the gun itself are fully as influential on the kind of targets obtained as is the intrinsic accuracy of the barrel or cartridge. And for practical field shooting at the longer ranges, beyond fifty yards, another factor, Ballistic Efficiency of the cartridge, becomes of equal importance with accuracy in influencing the direct hits made over unknown ranges, and is more important than muzzle energy in determining the shock power delivered to the hit target at long range. The less velocity a bullet loses in flight, the easier it is to hit with and the harder it hits at long range. In the light of their relative Ballistic Efficiency, or ability to sustain their velocities, and therefore energies, over a hundred yards range, the cartridges give first place to the .45 ACP next to the .38 ACP, then to the .44 Special, followed by the .38 Special and .45 Colt. The .35 Luger is in fifteenth place and the .30 Luger in seventh.

"Choice between autoloading pistol and revolver is of personal preference."

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Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through the Hollow Tree.

SOUTH of the Tehachapi range country is the Antelope Valley, and north of the range of San Gabriel and the San Bernardinos of southern California. At the edge of the Mojave Desert country is Antelope Valley.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: This is the greasewood and sage country, at the edge of the great Mojave, in southern California. Twenty-five miles to the south and east of Lancaster is our range land and our ranch. We are in Antelope Valley, between the Tehachapi range on the northwest and the San Bernardino on the south.

Rabbit hunting is the chief sport in the valley, for the Antelope Valley country is overrun with them. My sister and I are fair with the shooting irons, and we are in the saddle a great deal. A trek of a few hours takes us out into the desert country of the sage and sand or up into the mountains and into the timber country. We are only one day's trek from Old Mexico.

We have lots of time to yarn with you-all about the greasewood and sage country. We are sisters, sixteen and eighteen years of age, and eager to hear from you-all mighty pronto. We came to the Southwest from Alberta, Canada.

SISTERS OF THE SAGE COUNTRY.
Care of The Tree.

Arizona cow poke.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I can sling a lasso or fork a bronc any time I am asked, and there isn't anything I enjoy more than the ranch life. I was born and raised on a ranch in southern Arizona, and have been a cow poke since I was thirteen years old. Two years ago I left the range to throw in with Uncle Sam for a while, but when another years rolls by it's back to the Rio Grande for this hombre. And in the meantime, if any one wants to know what kind of a gringo I am, tell 'em to write to me muy pronto. A young maverick? Well, I'm twenty-six, folks.

EUGENE KIRKLAND.
Care of Sergeant Woods, Fort Robinson, Nebraska.

Trekking the Alaskan trail.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have trekked the Far North trail for a few years and have done everything from panning gold to fishing for salmon, and I have mushed over the trail at sixty below. The Far North country is a wonder country, and if there is any one, anywhere, who'd like to hear from up this way, let him get in touch with this twenty-five-year-old hombre who expects to stay here for the rest of his life.

Box 777, Juneau, Alaska. FRED ERICKSON.

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Ranging the West.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have ranged over this old West from border to border for the past twenty years, punching cattle and sometimes chasing outlaws for Uncle Sam. I was on the Mexican border ten years ago, and at that time there was no border patrol except the rangers, the best riders and six-gun hombres in the Longhorn State, in my opinion. While Texas is not my native State, I know what conditions are there, particularly on the border, and I am going back to the old Lone Star, some of these days, and going back to stay. Del Rio, on the banks of the Rio Grande, in Texas, is home to me.

I have some spare time, folks, and I would like to exchange a little chatter with some lonesome waddy, border patrol hombre, or ranger who would like to swap yarns with an hombre who has slept on blankets and faced a few blizzards. I'm still on night guard, but I'm not chasing the longhorns now. FRED LEE.

Deputy Sheriff, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Steamboat Springs.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We live on a ranch in northwestern Colorado, where the hunting, trapping, and fishing are of the best. We would be very glad to give some lad of from thirteen to eighteen a home with us, and will help him to get a grubstake so that he will have a good start in life. This is a beautiful country, and there is plenty of open space for horseback riding. We will be waiting to hear from the juniors of the Gang, folks. MRS. C. H.

Care of The Tree.

A son of pioneers.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My parents and my grandparents on my mother's side were among the first pioneers to settle in this section of the country. They located homesteads between ~~two~~ friendly Seminole Indian settlements. My mother's birthplace was the good old Longhorn State—Texas, and, with her father and seven brothers, she made the trip from Texas to Florida with ox teams. My father, Wisconsin born, left home at nineteen and carried mail through Wyoming by relay horses, and also through Indian Territory—at that time on the warpath!

When I was four years of age I made the trip from Georgia to Florida by mule team. Although I was born a Georgia cracker, Florida has been my home for twenty-five years. I have done quite a little trekking in the South, but have never been West, nor out of the States. I have a small pack of hounds which are used for fox and cat hunting, and often my neighbors join me and we have a merry time across the hills, some on horses, many in cars, and a few on foot. I have often followed the trap line, and have acted as guide for friends who love wild life. I am what you cowboys would call a fruit rancher, but my main hobby is the open country, with rod, gun, and camera. There are over a hundred lakes in the vicinity, folks, and deer and bear are in their old haunts.

Folks, I hope you will let a Southerner corral a few pals of the good old Western trails. And if you-all ever come along this trail, don't forget to yell. I am "Chuck" to my pals. CHARLES F. KINNEY.

Box 2, Waverly, Florida.

Trekkers going over the Tehachapi Mountains and into the Mojave of California will take the friend-maker badge along. Old-timers will recognize The Hollow Tree badge of friendship.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

The home of the red man.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Out in Oklahoma we have the prairies, the mountains, and we have buffalo, deer, antelope, and some bear in the forest preserve just north of Faxon, in the Wichita Mountains. Comanche County is the home of the red man, and I can tell you a good deal about our Indian brothers. I have seen a bit of the Arizon country and Texas, too. You hombres who have never seen the great staked plains of west Texas have missed something for sure. West Texas is the land of the yucca tree, the mirages, and the cattle ranches of the West.

Now all you hombres just take it for granted that I am waiting to hear from you-all, muy pronto. JOHN J. LAUEN.

General Delivery, Faxon, Oklahoma.

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The jungles of South America.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Do you-all want to hear something about the Amazon jungles, the head hunters, and the diamond and gold mines of South America? I was raised there in the Amazon jungles and lived there for sixteen years with my father.

Hombres, don't forget that I'm waiting for your letters. I hope to corral a few from San Diego, California, folks.

JOHN HERNACK.
11400 Forest Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.

Alpine, on the Mexican border.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: This is the range land of the longhorns, and there are many big outfits in the Big Bend country of southwestern Texas. My wife and I have a poultry ranch here in the Davis Mountains, just out of Alpine, and we are nearly five thousand feet above the sea level here. We are looking for a good pard, folks. This would be a mighty fine place for some young hombre who is fighting to regain his health. We are right in the most beautiful section of the Mexican border country.

HENRY CLAY TURCK.
Alpine, Texas.

The Southwest.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: There are so many of the Gang coming to the old Holla for information about Arizona that I thought I'd give you-all my box number so you-all could just start firing away with your questions. I am a regular information bureau on Arizona, as well as Nevada and California, and can tell more than a thing or two about mining, homesteading, and about the country and the climate in general.

JACK.
Box 793, Miami, Arizona.

"I am a British soldier serving in India, and would like to exchange some letters with folks in the United States or Canada," says William Poulson, Second Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers, Headquarters Madras District, Cubbon Road, Bangalore, India.

"We have roamed the open road through almost every State east of the Mississippi and would be glad to exchange our experiences with other trekkers of the trails. We'd especially like to hear from campers, everywhere. Canada is included, folks. We've made several short but delightful trips into that northern country." These Gangsters are Mr. and Mrs. F. J. Heim, 6319 Yale Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

"I'd like some pen pals from every part of the world," says this twenty-year-old English Gangster. Address the letters to Violet Docker, 17 Shirehall Park, Golders Green, London, N. W. 4, England.

Boulder Dam project.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have long been a reader of the Old Hollow, and as so many have brought their problems to the Owl, it must be a good place to bring them to.

My problem is this. We want to go West or South. We have been interested in the Boulder Dam project, but can't seem to get much information about it. We must have a healthy place and it must be one where we can earn a living. We have two children, a girl of twelve and a boy of ten. Any information we can get that will help us to find the right location will be appreciated. We love the snow and winter, but nine months out of twelve is too much, and so we are particularly interested in Colorado, Arizona, and Texas.

MRS. E. MCMAIN.
624 Woodlawn Avenue, Rockford, Illinois.

On the Mexican border.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I live away down here in the tip of Texas, right next door to Mexico. I love to ride a horse and have owned some dandies. I would like letters from the Gang.

BILLY LOU MERRELL.
Donna, Texas.

Farm land in Canada.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Being a soldier down here at the Panama Canal will surely bring to light any special interest in life one may have hidden away. I have one, and it is for the farming lands of western Canada. All letters from that part of the country will be appreciated.

PRIVATE H. FURTON.
Battery A, Sixty-fifth C. A. C., Fort Amadaro, Canal Zone.

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WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

By John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

SOME time ago we registered a regret in this department concerning the reluctance of our lumber-jack friends to talk out in meeting. In answer to this complaint, M. N. P., of Fresno, California, is volunteering a few remarks. To show our appreciation of a few words from one of these erstwhile silent hombres, we are giving him the place of honor upon this week's program!

"Just a few lines in answer to your knock about the proverbial silence of us lumberjacks, Mr. North. I have spent the past two years in the woods on the West coast, working in practically all the camps from Seattle, Washington, to Fresno, California. It would be hard to give you all the facts in one letter, but I will be glad to answer any letters from readers of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, or give them any information I can.

"Maybe you folks would be interested in a little general dope on the logging game in California, where I am now. This State, as you probably know, is the third in the United States in lumber output. It is the first in sugar pine and redwoods. The redwoods are big trees ranging from five to twenty-five feet in diameter. They grow from Crescent City to Fort Bragg on the coast. The sugar pines are found from Fresno north to the California line.

"There are many camps in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, most of which are between five and six thousand feet elevation. All the timber here and also most of the sugar pine camps are in government timber. That is, we have to log this timber according to government regulations. The rangers mark the trees to be felled, and the fellers are careful to save the seed trees and small second-growth as much as possible. The riggin' men, when they log a 'settin' off, have to put their lines out and pull the logs in in such a way as to knock down as little timber as possible.

"As I said before, Mr. North, I'm sure a willin' cuss when it comes to

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passin' out information. So don't be afraid to write to me, any of you hombres who want more dope on this subject."

Here is a chance for all interested chaps to be put wise to the logging game in the tall woods. Letters addressed to M. N. P. will be promptly forwarded.

Well, some folks are handing out facts, and other folks are reaching for them. In the latter group is Tom H., of Columbia, South Carolina. "I'm interested in the Wenatchee Valley of Washington, Mr. North, and would surely be mighty grateful to you for some information about this region. I've been advised by my doctor to get out into the outdoor West, and I'm looking around for a likely place. From all that I have heard the Wenatchee country sounds like a good spot to settle down, grow apples, and enjoy life. What do you think? Is this region healthful? How are the highways? What about the facilities for recreation? I'm thinking of motoring out that way to look the ground over for myself. Would I find a tourist park in the town of Wenatchee, where I could pitch my tent while I inspect the vicinity?"

As Tom probably knows, the Wenatchee Valley, situated in the geographical center of the State of Washington, has long been noted as the largest producer of high-grade apples in the entire world. From fifteen hundred to two thousand car-loads of apples and other fruits are shipped out every year. It seems to us that this valley would suit Tom down to a T, for it is one of the most healthful regions in the United States, the death rate being less than ten to the thousand for the last three years. This is due to a combination of causes, including an excellent climate, pure water, and abundant opportunities for out-door life and recreation. Within an hour's auto drive from Wenatchee there are to be found some of the most wonderful camping, hunting, and fishing recreation resorts in the world.

During the past few years great improvements have been made in the highways through the Wenatchee Valley, connecting it with all points east, west, north, and south. The Sunset Highway, which is a part of the Yellowstone Trail, passes through the Wenatchee Valley. The Stevens Pass Highway, recently opened up, provides a scenic road from Wenatchee to Seattle and Puget Sound points. The Rock Island-Trinidad Road connects Wenatchee with the North Central Highway at Quincy. South there is a good highway running down the Columbia and connecting with the Columbia River Highway to Portland. Wenatchee is also the southern terminus of the Okanogan-Cariboo Trail.

As for recreation facilities, there is no district where the hunter, fisherman, or sightseer can find more varied opportunities for indulging in his favorite pastime. Among the famous resorts which are easily reached from Wenatchee are Lake Chelan; the Methow Valley, sixty miles long; the Entiat, which extends for fifty miles through orchards and up into glaciers; Lake Wenatchee, along which Stevens Pass Highway passes; Icicle Creek Canyon, noted fishing and camping resort; the Grand Coulee, sixty miles east along the Sunset Highway.

In the cool lakes and sparkling streams dotted over this valley, the angler can find almost any variety of fishing that his soul craves. The smaller streams in the hills are well stocked with rainbow, cutthroat and eastern brook trout, while the lakes nestling among the mountains are the haunts of such fighting fish as the giant Mackinaw trout, and other large species.

This country proves equally attractive to the hunter, for grouse, Chinese pheasants, Hungarian partridges, and innumerable game birds fill the woods

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and the meadow districts. To the more ambitious sportsman the surrounding mountains offer such big game as deer, goat, bear, mountain lion, lynx, and various other animals of the cat family.

Yes, siree, Tom will find a mighty fine tourist camp in Wenatchee. It is located in Recreation Park and offers every modern facility to the automobile tourist. There are stalls where cars may be stored and where tourists may sleep if they have their own cots. A wash rack for cars is also provided. At the general office and pavilion are to be found washtubs with hot and cold water, shower baths, a grocery store where all staples may be purchased, and also a kitchen and dining room where meals may be prepared and served at regular tables under a roof. If Tom wants to pitch his tent, there is ample shade under which he may do so.

Altogether, we would say that the Wenatchee Valley seems a very likely spot and one that offers many opportunities to the homeseeker.

And speaking of opportunities, here is one that I'm betting will cause every prospective homesteader to pack up his duds and hit the open road pronto. Just read this epistle from G. M. D., of Chicago, Illinois, all you folks who have been dreaming for a coon's age of homes of your own in a new land. Such an honest-to-goodness invitation to join a colony of homesteaders doesn't come our way every day in the week.

"This letter may be a bit out of the ordinary, Mr. North," writes this Chicagoan, "but I hope you'll find space to publish it in your department. First of all just a word about myself, to show you that I know what I'm talking about. I have been in every State in the Union but four, and have also been over most of Canada. I was born and raised on a ranch in Wyoming.

"Now for my pet scheme. I would like to get in touch with three or four chaps, preferably with families, who are tired of the grind of factories and have a little pioneering spirit left. My plan is to trek up to western Alberta to take up homestead land, and I want some agreeable and reliable companions. There are over three and a half million acres in the Peace River Block alone, and many times that area in good farm land have I seen lying idle up in that region.

"Now, Mr. North, there must be some red-blooded fellows in these Eastern cities who would be glad of the chance to go out there where they could build up their own little kingdoms and be their own bosses, if only some one would give them a start. And if they helped each other out and had a real desire to make homes, I'll guarantee they would succeed all right.

"Next spring I am going up there, with my wife and child. I know the country pretty well, and should be only too glad to have a few fellows who want a start to go along or come to the same locality. I will give them all the help I can, and the benefit of my knowledge of Western life, farming, and ranching. I bet we'd soon have a rich little neighborhood fit to write home about."

If any of you folks are interested in this homesteading plan of G. M. D.'s, just drop him a line, in care of this department, and I'll see that he gets it.

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MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

BEESON, BERT, HARRY, ROY, and **KATHERINE.**—Were separated by the death of their parents. Information appreciated by Mrs. G. E. Pope, Box 455, Van Buren, Arkansas.

DUNIVAN, THOMAS T.—Twenty years old. Five feet, ten inches tall, dark hair, and blue eyes. Last heard from in McCamey, Texas, in 1927. Information appreciated by Monte Dunivan, Star Route 4, Lamesa, Texas.

POSTLEWAITE, JOE.—All has been forgiven. We need you. Please write to your daughter, Delaphine Postlewaite, care of Harry Crummel, 515 Wallace Avenue, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

SERGEANT HANSWALD.—Member of C Battery, Fourteenth F. A., in 1918-19. Please write to Lee Oliver, 112 West Pennsylvania Avenue, Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

DUNLAP, THOMAS BAKER.—Thirty-eight years old. Brown hair and eyes. Son of Mac and Hettie Dunlap. Born at Colfax, Washington, in October, 1891. Was living with a family named Boyd, at Panola, Illinois, when he was eleven years old. Information appreciated by his sister, Charlotte Boethm, 1419 North Thirteenth Street, Boise, Idaho.

COGDILL, GERTRUDE E.—Last known address was 327 Magnolia Street, Spartanburg, South Carolina. Information appreciated by C. L. C., care of this magazine.

SHEEDER, MRS. ELIZABETH, nee **FULLERTON,** and two daughters, **RUTH** and **LOIS.**—Formerly of Denver, Colorado. Information appreciated by R. Fullerton, Terry, Mississippi.

WILSON, BUCK.—Last heard from in Jersey City, New Jersey. Please write to your old pal, Dennie Miller, Cashmere, Washington.

FORSYTH, JOSEPH S.—Member of the Seventy-sixth Field Artillery, stationed at Fort D. A. Russell. Please write to your father and mother, 9251 Olivet Street, Detroit, Michigan.

MEDDINGS, WILLIAM F.—Believed to have joined the army. Your old home and pals, in West Virginia, are still waiting for you. Please write to Edith, care of this magazine.

H. C. R.—Am worried about you. No one else need know. Please write to your daughter, E. M. R., care of this magazine.

LeROY, BONES.—You know I won't slip up. Please write to your red-headed brother, Sparrow, care of this magazine.

WADE, FRANK.—Remember the trip from Seattle, South? I lost you in Pasadena, California. Please write to George Leslie, 1349 East Ferry Street, Detroit, Michigan.

FLEMING, LON C.—Am worried because you do not write. Fear there is something the matter with you. Please write to your wife, Florence, care of this magazine.

GORE, WILLIE.—Baby and I love you. Please come home or write to Mrs. Jennie Gore, Box 26, Durango, Colorado.

ROUNDS, JOSEPH ASA.—Fifty-five years old. Blue eyes, and weighed about two hundred pounds. Left his wife, Olive, and three children—Lenah, Louis, and Lauren—at Lake Mills, Wisconsin, in December, 1911. Information appreciated by his son-in-law, D. S., care of this magazine.

MURPHY, MICHAEL.—Of Chicago, Illinois. Served four years in the navy. Last heard from when he received his discharge, at Portland, Oregon, in June, 1927. Information appreciated by J. P. Murphy, care of Sylvanite Ranger Station, Troy, Montana.

WARNICKE, GEORGE.—Last heard from in 1917. Please write to Laura, at the same address or care of this magazine.

O'ROURKE, PETER.—Was stationed in Massachusetts, in 1920. Please write to F. D. Hill, Rochester, New York.

NELSON, FRED.—Last heard from on the "Fred Luckenbach" from San Francisco. Remember Boats, and I, and Phillie, in 1921? Please write to F. D. Hill, Rochester, New York.

COLE, JAMES W.—Last heard from in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Please write to F. D. Hill, Rochester, New York.

IGOE or **IGO.**—John Igo married Bridget Lenahan, in Kingston, New York. They had three children—James, Katie, and Bridget. John's wife had two brothers—Dennie and Joseph—and one sister, Mary. They all left New York State several years ago, for Newark, Ohio. Information concerning them or their descendants appreciated by Michael Igo, 190 Bleecker Street, New York City.

EDDIE.—Mother loves and believes in you. Maybe I can help you untangle things. Don't know what everything is about. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

DeWITT, LOUIS.—Last heard from in Albany, Oregon, in 1918. Believed to have moved to Riverside, California, and later to Arlington. Information appreciated by J. W. Buckley, Crystal Springs, North Dakota.

ROGERS, MRS. ALICE, nee **BYRNE,** and brother, **HORACE BYRNE.**—Do you remember Bettie and "B"? Please write to your old pal, Bettie, care of this magazine.

BRYAN.—Would like to hear from relatives of the late William H. Bryan, formerly of Adams County, Ohio, and later a minister of the Nazarene Church in Newport, Kentucky. Address his daughter, Roxie Reeve, 620 South Everett Street, Wichita, Kansas.

SCOTT, LIZZIE MAY.—The past is forgotten. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Alice Scott Hankins, Route 2, Jackson, Michigan.

MILLER, JOSEPH.—When last heard of had left Mount Gay, West Virginia, for Massachusetts. Do you remember your old pal, Sooky, in Lenox, Georgia? Please write to E. H., care of this magazine.

OLIE.—Please come home, or write to your wife and children, same address, or care of this magazine.

WALLACE, MRS. ODIE.—Last seen in Binger, Oklahoma. Please come home or write to J. C., Box 1118, Sapulpa, Oklahoma.

VENTURA, BILL.—Why did you stop writing? Please write to Beatrice, care of this magazine.

MENTION, ROBERT, or **GEORGE WILSON.**—Please write to your mother, care of this magazine.

REYNOLDS, HORACE.—Everything is forgiven. Your son needs your help. Please write to Carrie, care of this magazine.

JOHNSON.—Would like to hear from relatives of the late Frank D. Johnson. Address Marie Catherine Johnson, 304 West Twenty-eighth Street, New York City.

POE, CECIL.—Last heard from in Charleston, West Virginia, in 1926. Please write to C. R. Rankins, Woodrow, West Virginia.

PRICE, MAYE.—Formerly of Alexandria, Louisiana. I am back from the ranch. Please write to Bob Stallings, Aberdeen, Idaho.

SHEICHE, MELVINE.—Short, with blue eyes and brown hair. Last seen in California. Information appreciated by Daniel Jacoby, 610 West One Hundred and Fiftieth Street, New York City.

SIKES, JOSEPH.—Was in Coffeyville, Kansas, in 1898, and again in 1903. Information appreciated by his daughter, Bessie Sikes, 407 Spruce Street, Route 4, Coffeyville, Kansas.

HALE, BARNEY and **ODIE.**—Sixteen and seventeen years old, respectively. Children of Reese and Gussie Hale. Last heard from somewhere in Texas. Information appreciated by their aunt, Mrs. A. L. Harris, Star, Texas.

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CASH, CLAUDE C.—Five feet nine inches tall, light hair, and blue eyes. Last heard from in Base Hospital 114, A. E. F., ten years ago. Information appreciated by Mrs. Lillian Olson, 326 East Broadway, Butte, Montana.

BRINGANCE, CLYDE.—Nineteen years old. Five feet eleven inches tall, brown eyes, and dark-brown hair. Last heard from aboard the S. S. "Gulf Light," Gulf Refining Co. ship. Please write to J. C. Penz, 418 McKinney Avenue, Houston, Texas.

SAFFREED, LEO.—Twenty-one years old. Last seen in Corpus Christi, Texas. Last heard from in Kingsville, Texas. Please write to your old pal, J. C. Penz, 418 McKinney Avenue, Houston, Texas.

R. S. R.—Have paid V. News for you. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

WOLFF, FRANZ EMIL.—Came from the Dominican Republic, in 1923, to go to St. Olaf College, at Northfield, Minnesota. Last heard from in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Please write to your pal, Socorro Reventos, 10 West Sixty-fifth Street, New York City.

TEMPLE, WILLIAM.—Last heard from in Stockton, California, in 1921. Please write to your son, News, from Great Lakes, care of this magazine.

BARKER, ROBERT and **CHARLES.**—Have missed you both. Mother is still in Akron. Please write to Dorothy Keller, Waukegan, Illinois.

SNYDER, or **GRIFFITH, WARREN FRED.**—Forty-three years old. Five feet eight inches tall, gray eyes, and ruddy complexion. Last heard from in New York City, in November, 1928, at which time he was working as cabin steward on a fruit freighter. Information appreciated by his wife, Mrs. Warren Snyder, R. F. D. 1, Latrobe, Pennsylvania.

NOTICE.—Joseph B. Taylor was born in North Ireland, and died in California. His wife later married John Taylor, son of Daniel Taylor, who came to California from Illinois in 1849. Joseph B. Taylor had a daughter, who is believed to be living near Stockton, California. Information appreciated by E. Walbring, Box 34, Camp Point, Illinois.

LAUMAN.—For four years we have been looking for you. Please write to your heartbroken parents. George Christianson, 705 South Ash Street, Crookston, Minnesota.

WHITE, JOHN.—Fifty years old. Left Wauchula, Florida, in June, 1927. Please write to your old pal, L. F. Owen, Wauchula, Florida.

BROWN, GARLAND L.—Last heard from in Maud, Oklahoma. Please write to your old pal, Alvie E. Blackman, Borger, Texas.

OLSON, JOHN EDWIN.—Last heard from at Eau Claire, Wisconsin, in 1918. Please write to your brother, Herbert Olson, 2404 Twelfth Street, Two Rivers, Wisconsin.

STALLING, MRS. K. C., nee **BERTIE FORMAN.**—When last heard from was running a beauty parlor in Eastland, Texas. Information appreciated by E. M. S., care of this magazine.

SANDERS, ERNEST BAXTER.—Thirty-four years old. Five feet six inches tall, brown hair, and gray eyes. Last heard from in Douglas, Georgia, in 1926. His mother is very worried and needs him. Information appreciated by Lettie Sanders, Dewy Rose, Georgia.

SMITH, MARION T.—Last seen near Tremont, Indiana, March 10, 1929. Please write to your father, Milton H. Smith, Chesterton, Indiana.

HALL, J. W., SR. and **JR.,** and **EARL HALL.**—My father separated from my mother twenty-two years ago, taking with him my two brothers, J. W., Jr., who was born in 1896, and Earl, who was born in 1903. Information appreciated by Goldie, care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—Members of the Seventh Cavalry, Troop B, Fort Bliss, Texas. Please write to Smitty, care of this magazine.

HERBERT, HARRY P.—Last heard from in the Philippine Islands. Please write to your pal, Smitty, care of this magazine.

LLOYD, FRANK.—Evelyn's husband is dead, and we need you. Please write to your mother, Mrs. Gautt Williams, Newport, Arkansas.

PINKSTON, ROBERT.—Formerly of Fort Smith and Van Buren, Arkansas. Last heard from en route to Detroit, Michigan. Please write to J. V. N., care of this magazine.

HENDERSON, SAMMY.—Eleven years old. I am at the Alderson place. Please come home to your mother, or write to Irene Henderson, Route 1, Locksburg, Arkansas.

HENDERSON, S. J.—Forty-nine years old. Blond hair and ruddy complexion. Left home in August, 1928. Last heard from in Alton, Texas, in February, 1929. Information appreciated by Mrs. Irene Henderson, Route 1, Locksburg, Arkansas.

BURKS, ROSE.—Very important. Information appreciated by Burdie G., care of this magazine.

MURPHY, MARY.—Formerly of Crescent, Rahaney County, Dublin, Ireland. Heard from at 56 Birch Street, Boston, Massachusetts, and later in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Information appreciated by her cousin, J. Kelley, 102A Westbourne Grove, London, W., England.

McCLENNEN, WILLIAM.—Fifty-five years old. A blacksmith and ex-railroad man. Last heard from at Ratio, Arkansas. Information appreciated by his cousin, Hessie Wilson, Blytheville, Arkansas.

GARRETT, BIRTIS.—Twenty-four years old. Last heard from in Amory, Mississippi, in 1928. Information appreciated by Hessie Wilson, Blytheville, Arkansas.

WEAVER, MRS. CLAIRE.—Thirty-nine years old. Weighs about one hundred and twenty pounds. May be employed as a maid. Last heard from in Beaumont, Texas, in August, 1927. Information appreciated by L. B., care of this magazine.

NEWTON, LUCY CAROLINE.—Formerly of Camden, New Jersey. Will her relatives please communicate with Mrs. Edith Edwards, 240 Otis Street, West Newton, Massachusetts?

C. E. H.—I forgive you. Please write to Edna, care of this magazine.

MAPES, or **SWEET, FLOYD.**—I am free to go anywhere. Please write to your old friend, S. Shaw, care of this magazine.

HARRY.—We want you and need you. Please write to the same address or to Doris and Laura, care of this magazine.

HOLMS, GEORGE C.—At one time a salesman for the Wildroot Co., Buffalo, New York. Last known address was the Venetian Hotel, Miami, Florida. Do you remember the trip you took in January, 1927? Please write to X. Y. Z., care of this magazine.

ALLEN, FRANK POWELL.—Twenty-two years old. Five feet ten inches tall, dark hair, and gray eyes. Last heard from in Temple, Texas, in July, 1925. An auto mechanic. Information appreciated by Father and Mother, care of this magazine.

A. E. C.—I am going home this summer. Please send your address. All O. K. Write to Mother, care of this magazine.

SMITH, DORA.—Believed to have been placed in an orphans' home in Hot Springs, Arkansas, nineteen years ago. Information appreciated by an uncle, Bradley Smith, Box 162, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

CLARK, BETTY.—Last heard from in Mount Shasta City, California, in 1925. Information appreciated by Al, care of this magazine.

MAHSING, WILHELM REINHOLD.—Fifty years old. A metalsmith. Formerly of Rega, Latvia. Last heard from in San Francisco, California, in 1914. Information appreciated by his sister, Don R., care of this magazine.

SMITH, HAPPY.—Everything is all right. Please write as soon as possible to Mrs. Ethel Nothardt, 126 North Dale Street, St. Paul, Minnesota.

KITTLE, FRANK MARION.—Left Waterford, Michigan, March 25, 1928. Mother is ill. Information appreciated by F. I. K., care of this magazine.

STONE, RUSSELL.—A seaman. Last heard from on a freight vessel leaving Holland. Information appreciated by his niece, Florence Bagger, East Smith Road, Medina, Ohio.

GENTRY, WILLIAM.—Fifteen years old. Last heard from in Nashville, Tennessee, in the fall of 1928. Please write to Willie, care of this magazine.

HARRY.—I am still in Texas at your home. Please write to us; we are worried. Everything will be all right. Fred, care of this magazine.

RICHARDSON, JACK.—Formerly of Akron, Ohio. Please write to Dad, 121 Tenth Street, Toledo, Ohio.

B., WILLIAM JOSEPH.—I am very worried about you. Please write to your wife, Winifred H. B., care of this magazine.

L. P. H.—Who advertised for Jerry B. We have news for you. Please send your address.

DeLOREY, EDWARD F.—We are holding a letter at this office for you. Please write to Anna, care of this magazine.

COONEY, LESLIE.—Who advertised for Mary Craig Cooney. We are holding letters at this office for you. Please send for them.

GREEN, JAMES F.—Please write to your old pal, Joe, 209 Front Street, East, Toronto 2, Ontario, Canada.

BRADFORD, BARBARA.—Am waiting. Still love you. Anxious to hear from you. Please write to John F. W., care of this magazine.

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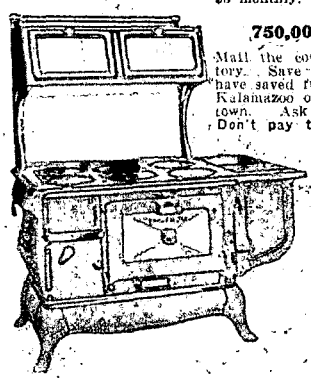

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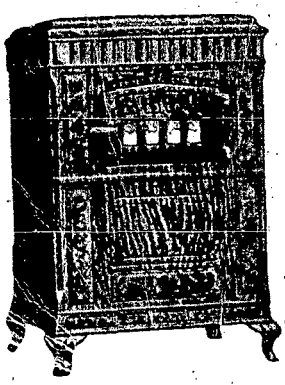

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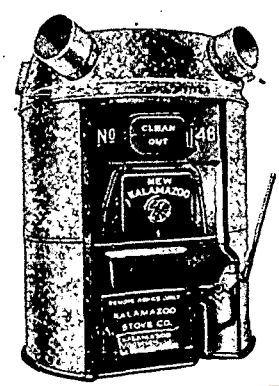

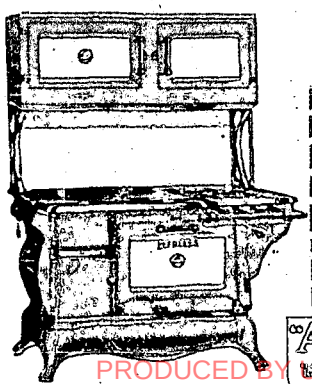

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